The UK Dog Behaviour and Training Charter

Standard Membership Criteria for Organisations (Regulatory Framework Version 3)

Contents

1. Purpose and Framework Structure.

This document defines the mandatory, enforceable standards required for an organisation to qualify as a Standard Member Organisation of The UK Dog Behaviour and Training Charter (hereafter referred to as "The Charter").

Membership of the Charter is granted as standard membership only and does not confer a directorship position within the Charter. Only founding member organisations are eligible to hold director positions on the Charter board.

These standards are designed to:

- Protect animal welfare and emotional wellbeing.
- Ensure competence and professional accountability.
- Provide a transparent, auditable framework for self-regulation.
- Meet the expectations of scrutiny for professional standards.

1.1 Framework Structure.

The Charter operates as a tiered system of oversight and accountability, defined as follows:

Level 1 – The Charter.

The Charter:

- Sets the overarching standards for practice, education and ethics.
- Approves and monitors Member Organisations.
- Has the authority to audit, investigate, and enforce compliance in Member Organisations.
- Acts as the escalation body where issues cannot be resolved at organisational level.

Level 2 – Member Organisations.

Member organisations:

- Apply and enforce The Charter standards within their own membership.
- Assess, approve, and oversee Individual Members.
- Maintain complaints, disciplinary, and audit processes.
- Are responsible for ensuring their Individual Members remain compliant with The Charter requirements.

Level 3 – Individual Members

Individual Members (also known as Practitioners):

- Deliver training and behaviour services to the public.

- Must comply with the standards set by their Member Organisation and The Charter.
- Are accountable to their Member Organisation for their conduct and practice.

1.2. Escalation Pathway

- Complaints and concerns must first be addressed at the Member Organisation level.
- Where a matter cannot be resolved or where there is evidence of:
    - Organisational failure,
    - conflict of interest,
    - systemic non-compliance,

  the issue may be escalated to The Charter for review and action. The Charter retains the authority to intervene where necessary to ensure compliance with its standards. In these cases, The Charter has authority over both the Member Organisation and Individual Members to enforce the standards outlined in this document.

2. Definitions

For the purposes of The Charter, the following definitions apply. These definitions are intended to ensure consistency of interpretation, support enforceability, and reduce ambiguity in the application of standards.

i. **"***Member" or "Member Organisation":*

Means an Organisation that has been formally admitted to The Charter following approval against the published membership criteria, and that remains subject to ongoing compliance with The Charter's standards, obligations, audit requirements, and enforcement framework as a condition of maintaining membership status.

ii. *Aversive Method:*

Any training or behaviour method, technique, or application of stimulus that results in, or is reasonably likely to result in, pain, fear, distress, or intimidation, regardless of intent.

A method will be considered aversive where a reasonably competent professional, applying current knowledge of behavioural science and animal welfare, would expect it to produce adverse welfare effects.

iii. *Distress:*

Observable or measurable indicators of negative affective state exceeding normal or transient emotional responses, including but not limited to behavioural, physiological, or contextual indicators consistent with compromised welfare, interpreted in relation to the individual animal and situation.

iv. *Welfare:*

Welfare refers to the current, dynamic state of an individual's body and brain in relation to their immediate and ongoing ability to cope with internal and external environmental demands.

This includes:

- physiological functioning (health, stress physiology, homeostasis),
- behavioural functioning (coping strategies and behavioural expression),
- affective experience (positive and negative emotional states).

  Welfare is therefore:

  - state-dependent,
  - biologically grounded,
  - continuously fluctuating,
  - directly observable or inferable through indicators.

Welfare reflects how well or poorly an individual is coping in real time or near-real time. It does not, on its own, represent overall life quality beyond the assessed time frame.

v. *Wellbeing:*

Wellbeing refers to the overall quality and trajectory of an individual's lived experience over time, encompassing cumulative welfare states, psychological functioning, behavioural flexibility, and environmental and social conditions.

Wellbeing includes:

- integration of multiple welfare states over time,
- cognitive appraisal and emotional experience patterns,
- resilience and adaptive capacity,
- stability or variability of affective experience,
- environmental and social context influencing quality of life.

  Wellbeing is therefore:

  - broader than welfare,
  - longitudinal and cumulative in nature,
  - interpretive and evaluative,
  - context-dependent across time.

Wellbeing reflects the total lived quality of life, not isolated or momentary states.

Critical Distinction of Non-Interchangeability

For the purposes of The Charter:

- Welfare and wellbeing are not interchangeable terms.
- Welfare refers to current state of coping and functioning.
- Wellbeing refers to overall quality of life across time, incorporating welfare but extending beyond it.

A change in welfare state does not automatically indicate a change in overall wellbeing, and wellbeing cannot be inferred from a single welfare snapshot without longitudinal and contextual evidence.

Where welfare reflects "how the individual is doing now", wellbeing reflects "how the individual's life is going overall".

vi. *Ethical Training:*

Training that:

- Minimises risk of adverse welfare and wellbeing outcomes.
- Prioritises the animal's emotional state and long-term wellbeing.
- Applies the principle of least intrusive, effective intervention.

vii. *Reward-Based Training:*

Training that primarily uses reinforcement strategies to increase desired behaviours and does not rely on aversive methods as defined in this document.

viii. *Competence:*

The demonstrable ability to:

- Apply knowledge and skills effectively in real-world scenarios.
- Achieve behavioural outcomes without compromising welfare or wellbeing.
- Adapt methods appropriately to individual animals and contexts.

Competence must be measurable, evidenced, and formally assessed.

Assessors must have met their Organisations' Assessment, Assessing or Assessor Training Criteria with demonstrable professional experience (as defined below).

- Evidence of competence in assessment or supervision of practitioners.

ix. *Reasonably Competent Professional:*

An individual who:

- Possesses the level of knowledge, skill, and judgement reasonably expected of a practitioner operating within the field of animal behaviour and training.
- Applies current, evidence-informed understanding of animal behaviour, learning theory, wellbeing and welfare science.
- Acts in accordance with generally accepted professional standards within the sector.

This standard is used to assess whether decisions, methods, or outcomes would be considered acceptable within current, up-to-date professional and scientific norms.

x. *Immediate Safety Risk:*

A situation in which there is a credible and imminent risk of injury to a person or animal that cannot be mitigated through lower-risk interventions, based on the assessment of a reasonably competent professional and considering both the severity and likelihood of harm.

Such situations must be clearly distinguishable from general management challenges or training needs and must not be used to justify routine or ongoing use of higher-risk interventions.

xi. *Viable Lower-Risk Alternative:*

An alternative intervention to the proposed method that would be expected, by a reasonably competent professional, to achieve the required outcome with less risk to welfare and wellbeing.

An alternative is considered not viable only where it does not sufficiently mitigate the identified immediate safety risk.

xii. *Proportionate (Intervention Use):*

An intervention is proportionate where:

- Its intensity and duration must not exceed what is necessary to manage the identified risk or behavioural objective.
- It is appropriate to the severity and context of the situation.

xiii. *Actively Monitored:*

A process in which:

- The animal's behavioural and emotional state is continuously or regularly observed.

- Adjustments are made promptly in response to indicators of distress or welfare compromise.
- Observations are documented where required for audit or review.

xiv. *Independent Case Study:*

A documented case involving:

- A distinct animal and client.
- A unique presenting issue or behavioural context.
- Work that is independently produced by the submitting Individual Member. Where common or standardised case study scenarios are used, responses must demonstrate the individual's own analysis, decision-making, and justification, and must not replicate, duplicate, or reuse another individual's work.

xv. *Structured Learning (CPD):*

Learning activities that:

- Have defined learning objectives.
- Are relevant to behaviour, training, welfare or wellbeing.
- Result in identifiable knowledge or skill development.

Passive or unstructured activities without clear learning outcomes do not meet this definition.

xvi. *Audit:*

A formal review process involving the examination of records, evidence, and/or practices to verify compliance with The Charter standards, such as:

- Examination of records, documentation, and/or evidence.
- Verification of compliance with The Charter standards.
- Identification of non-compliance or areas requiring corrective action.

xvii. *Random Audit:*

An audit in which subjects are selected using a method that is demonstrably unbiased, and not based solely on known issues, complaints, or prior performance.

xviii. *Systemic Failure:*

A pattern of non-compliance in which:

- The Charter standards are not consistently applied or enforced.
- Failures occur across multiple members, cases, or over time.

- The organisation is unable or unwilling to correct identified issues.

xix. *Misleading Representation:*

Any communication or presentation that:

- Provides false information, OR
- Omits material information, OR
- Creates a false or inaccurate impression of methods, outcomes, or standards.

xx. *Unsafe Practice:*

Any action or omission that creates an unreasonable risk of harm to an animal or person, considering the context and the knowledge expected of a reasonably competent professional.

xxi. *Real-World Application:*

Application of knowledge and skills in contexts that require applied decision-making in realistic or representative behaviour scenarios. This may include work based on actual cases, anonymised cases, or robustly designed, structured simulated cases that reflect real-world complexity. Purely abstract or theoretical discussion without application to a case or scenario does not meet this definition.

xxii. *Outcome Evaluation:*

The process of assessing behavioural change through:

- Observable or measurable indicators (behavioural change).
- Comparison to baseline behaviour.
- Consideration of welfare and wellbeing impact.

xxiii. *Behaviour modification principles:*

The application of evidence-based behavioural science to assess, prevent, and/or change undesirable or problematic animal behaviour through structured, humane, wellbeing and welfare-focused interventions, using learning theory, functional analysis of behaviour, and the systematic adjustment of antecedents and consequences, supported where appropriate by validated behavioural and wellbeing assessment frameworks that evaluate both observable behaviour and underlying emotional and motivational state to inform ethical, measurable, and outcomes-based practice or referral, where needed.

3. Ethical Training Standards

3.1 Organisations must require members to:

- Use reward-based, welfare and wellbeing-led training approaches.
- Apply methods consistent with least intrusive, effective intervention principles.
- Not use, recommend, or promote aversive methods/tools, including but not limited to:
    - Shock collars
    - Prong collars
    - Garotte/grot collars
    - Choke chains
    - Spray collars
    - Electric fences
    - Any noise emitting devices used to reduce or eliminate behaviour
    - Intentionally tightening harnesses
    - Any application of force, fear, pain, or intimidation to reduce behaviour.

3.2 Controlled Exception Protocol:

Use of otherwise restricted equipment such as 15mm diameter minimum slip leads with a stop or appropriately conditioned static headcollars, but excluding aversive methods/tools as listed in 3.1 above, is permitted only under all the following safety conditions and must not be used to reduce behaviour:

a. Immediate safety risk exists (animal or human).

b. No viable lower-risk alternative is available.

c. Use is:
    - Time-limited.
    - Proportionate.
    - Actively monitored.

Implemented alongside a documented behaviour modification plan where applicable, with the aim of reducing and, where possible, eliminating the need for such equipment.

d. A written justification record is created and held with the Member Organisation including:
    - Context.
    - Rationale.
    - Duration of use.
    - Welfare and wellbeing mitigation steps.
    - Where applicable, details of the associated behaviour modification plan and review points.

e. Evidence must be available for audit by the Member Organisation and The Charter.

Failure to meet all conditions constitutes a breach.

4. Code of Ethics

Organisations must:

- Maintain a mandatory, online, publicly accessible Code of Ethics.
- Submit and maintain a current version with The Charter.
- Notify the Charter in writing of any changes within 14 days.

4.1 Minimum Required Content:

The Code must explicitly include:

- Animal welfare and emotional wellbeing obligations.
- Professional conduct toward clients and professionals.
- Prohibition of:
    - Defamation.
    - Misrepresentation.
    - Harassment.
- Referral obligations (e.g. veterinary, clinical cases).
- Legal compliance requirements.

4.2 Enforcement Requirements:

The Code must include:

- Defined categories of breach.
- Proportionate sanctions.
- Documented disciplinary procedures.
- Right of response for accused members.

5. Education and Knowledge Standards

Member Organisations must ensure members meet minimum knowledge and assessment standards.

5.1 Minimum Knowledge Domains:

Members **must** demonstrate assessed knowledge in:

- Learning theory (operant and classical conditioning).
- Canine behaviour and communication.
- Welfare and wellbeing.
- Ethics and professional responsibility.
- Behaviour modification principles.

5.2 Minimum Education Threshold:

Members must meet at least ONE of the following:

- Qualification aligned to Level 3 or above in dog training/behaviour or animal training/behaviour, which includes canine (or equivalent).
- OR a formally assessed programme including:
  - Minimum 120 guided learning hours.
  - Formal assessment (written + applied).

5.3 Assessment Requirement:

All education pathways must include:

- Formal assessment of learning.
- Criteria to be met is defined and documented.
- No attendance-only certification accepted.

6. Practical Competence Assessment

6.1 Minimum Evidence Requirements:

Members must demonstrate competence through:

- Minimum 2 independent case studies, including:
  - Behavioural assessment or training plan.
  - Intervention plan.
  - Outcome evaluation.
- At least one observed or video-recorded session.
- Assessment across different case types or contexts.

6.2 Assessment Standards:

Must evaluate the practical application of knowledge and skills to behavioural cases or training scenarios, demonstrating applied decision-making beyond theoretical understanding alone.

Must be conducted by assessors who:

- Have at least 3 years professional experience.
- Are a reasonably competent professional.

6.3 Prohibited Assessment Models:

The following alone are insufficient:

- Assessment based solely on theoretical knowledge without real-world application to behavioural cases or scenarios (e.g. purely descriptive, knowledge-recall, or research-based assessment).
- Self-declared competence.
- Unassessed observation.

7. Conscientious Marketing and Representation

Applies to Member Organisations and Individual Members.

7.1 Mandatory Requirements:

Content must:

- Accurately represent methods used.
- Not make misleading representations.
- Reflect actual training practices.

7.2 Welfare Representation Standard:

Content must not:

- Depict animals in distress without clear context and resolution.
- Present unsafe practices without explanation.
- Misrepresent behavioural states.

7.3 Professional Conduct:

Organisations and members must adhere to standards of professional conduct that prohibit:

- Defamation.
- Targeted harassment.
- Misrepresentation of other professionals.

8. Professional Insurance

Members must:

- Hold insurance where legally required in their country of operation.
- Cover in-person and remote services.

Organisations must verify compliance annually.

9. Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

Member Organisations must ensure their Individual Members meet the following CPD requirements:

9.1 Minimum Requirement

All Individual Members of Member Organisations must complete a minimum of 10 hours of CPD annually.

9.2 Quality Criteria

CPD must:

- Be relevant to behaviour, training, welfare or wellbeing.
- Include structured learning (not passive consumption only) with defined outcomes.

9.3 Verification

- Individual Member CPD records must be maintained for a minimum of 3 years.

- These records must be available for audit.

10. Complaints and Disciplinary Procedures

10.1 Structure

Organisations **must** maintain:

- Written complaints procedures.
- Defined investigation processes.
- Documented outcomes.

10.2 Independence Safeguards

Complaints must be reviewed within each Member Organisation by:

- A panel of at least 2 individuals, OR
- An independent reviewer where a conflict of interest exists.

10.3 Escalation

These Complaints and Disciplinary Procedures **must** include clear pathways to:

- External authorities (e.g. legal, regulatory, veterinary bodies).
- The Charter's oversight committee as outlined on The Charter website.
- Independent appeal, first within their Member Organisations where appropriate or to The Charter.

11. Member Oversight and Audit Requirements

Organisations must:

- Maintain a public professional member directory.
- Conduct:
    - Annual compliance review.
    - Random audit of at least 5% of members per year.
    - Ensure audit consistency and internal validation through a documented process that cross-checks findings for reliability across auditors and over time.

11.1 Audit Scope

May include:

- Case records.

- CPD logs.
- Training practices.
- Content review as in the Marketing section.

12. Organisational Governance

Organisations must demonstrate:

- Defined leadership structure.
- Clear accountability roles.
- Documented policies.
- Decision-making transparency.

12.1 Mandatory Governance Requirements

Organisations must have the following:

- Conflict of interest policy.
- Appeals process for members.
- Defined escalation procedures.

13. Charter Oversight and Enforcement Powers

The Charter reserves the right to:

- Audit Member Organisations.
- Request evidence of compliance.
- Investigate complaints through The Charter Oversight Committee.

13.1 Sanctions

Where non-compliance is identified, The Charter will apply a structured, proportionate, and transparent escalation framework aligned to the severity, frequency, and risk impact of the breach, and assessed against the published membership criteria. Enforcement measures will be applied consistently across all Member Organisations and supported by documented evidence and written rationale for each decision.

Sanctions may include:

- Advisory notice for minor or first-time administrative non-compliance, requiring clarification or correction without formal penalty.
- Corrective action plan for remedial compliance, including defined actions, evidence requirements, and time-bound deadlines, with follow-up verification.

- Conditional compliance status where ongoing or material issues exist, allowing continued membership subject to enhanced monitoring and additional audits.
- Suspension of membership where there is repeated, unresolved, or significant non-compliance, with reinstatement contingent on verified corrective action.
- Revocation of Charter Member Organisation status in cases of serious, persistent, or fundamental breach of membership criteria, refusal or failure to implement required corrective actions, or where continued membership would undermine the integrity or objectives of The Charter.

Member Organisations shall be provided with written reasons for any sanction applied and, where appropriate, an opportunity to respond or appeal prior to escalation, except in cases where immediate action is required to mitigate significant risk.

13.2 Grounds for Removal from The Charter

Include:

- Systemic failure to enforce standards.
- Misrepresentation of compliance.
- Repeated or serious ethical breaches.

14. Summary of Requirements

Member Organisations **must**:

- Enforce non-aversive, welfare and wellbeing-led training and behaviour modification.
- Meet defined education thresholds.
- Assess competence using multi-layered evidence.
- Maintain enforceable ethics codes.
- Require verified CPD.
- Operate transparent complaints systems.
- Conduct audits and oversight.
- Comply with governance requirements.
- Submit to Charter-level enforcement.

15. Application Decisions and Appeals

15.1 Decision Transparency.

Where an application for membership to The Charter is declined, the applicant organisation will be provided with:

- A written explanation of the decision.
- Clear identification of the criteria or standards not met.
- Where applicable, guidance on actions required to meet those standards.

15.2 Opportunity for Remediation.

Applicants may, where appropriate:

- Address identified gaps.
- Submit additional evidence.
- Reapply for membership following corrective action.

15.3 Appeals Process.

Applicants have access to an appeals process when they believe a decision has been made:

- In error.
- Without appropriate consideration of evidence.
- Inconsistently with The Charter standards.

Appeals must:

- Be reviewed by an individual or panel not involved in the original decision.
- Be based on documented evidence and criteria.
- Result in a clear, reasoned outcome.

15.4 Scope of Appeal.

The appeals process is limited to review of:

- Application of The Charter standards.
- Interpretation of evidence submitted.

It does not permit re-assessment outside the defined criteria.

15.5 Applying for Membership.

Organisations applying for membership must submit evidence demonstrating compliance with the criteria outlined in this document. Supporting guidance and a structured submission checklist will be provided separately to ensure consistency and transparency in the application and assessment process.

16. Final Statement

This framework establishes a defensible, auditable, and enforceable system of professional self-regulation designed to:

- Protect animal welfare and emotional wellbeing.
- Ensure practitioner competence within Member Organisations.
- Maintain public trust.
- Provide a credible alternative to statutory regulation.
- The Charter reserves the right to audit Membership organisations.