

UK Dog Behaviour and Training Charter

FAQs

What is the UK Dog Behaviour and Training Charter?

There seems to be a lot of confusion about what the Charter is. Perhaps that is because it is something unique in the dog world and so it's hard to pigeonhole. It is not 'yet another organisation' or 'more hoops for professionals to jump through' – as has been suggested recently on social media.

At its heart, the UK Dog Behaviour and Training Charter is nothing more complicated than a code of ethics that organisations can put their names behind to show the world that:

- a) They and their members will never use aversive equipment or methodology, as they recognise that there is no place for that in a modern, progressive, science-led profession.
- b) Their members are fully accountable - both by each organisations' own codes of ethics and conduct, and also in the case of appeals, by the Charter's independent Oversight Committee.

These commitments mean that the public can choose a behaviour or training professional knowing that: their dog will never be abused, scared or frightened in the name of training or behaviour modification; that these professionals will constantly be keeping their knowledge and skills up to date so that they are providing the most modern, science-based approach that recognises each dog and owner's individual needs; and that if there are any complaints against any individual, there is a clear complaints procedure through the organisation, with additional secondary oversight if necessary.

Who are the Oversight Committee?

The Oversight Committee are there to look at any appeals as a second level of professional accountability.

It was important to form an Oversight Committee who were truly independent. They needed to not be linked to any one of the existing organisations, or to any who could foreseeably become a member in the future, in order to ensure total impartiality.

As such, this committee is formed of established professionals who are highly respected in their own fields, and who have an interest in dog behaviour and training but do not work within it.

In the case of appeals, their job is to look at the complaint and ascertain whether a breach of the individual member's codes of ethics has occurred, and/or a breach of the Charter's code of ethics, and rule accordingly.

So why is the Charter unique?

There is a saying in the profession that goes: “If you get three behaviourists/trainers in the one room, the only thing that two of them will ever agree on is that the third is doing it wrong”! And up until now, that very sadly has been true. We might be all about dogs and we might be positive – but historically we don’t play nice together! The Charter has changed that.

The Charter is a group of organisations who have, for the sake of dogs and their people, put that competitiveness aside recognising that there is far more that unites us than divides us. While they have different approaches and focuses, they agree on the core values of the Charter - Methodology, Accountability and Professionalism - and want to champion that, because that is what the public and the UK’s dogs need.

Why should my organisation join the Charter – it doesn’t seem particularly well known and I don’t see what’s in it for us?

The UK Dog Behaviour and Training Charter isn’t about what you can get out of it – or certainly that’s not its focus. At the risk of using a cliché, it’s about what you put in.

Signing up to the Dog Charter is about publicly standing up as an organisation and saying that your organisation supports, and indeed insists on, positive methodology and will stand against aversives, and that you uphold a code of conduct and oversight that means people can have faith in the professionals that they choose to help them with their dogs.

Why is that important?

Firstly, the public need to know who they can trust with their beloved dog. They need to know that the professional they choose to help them has the skills to do that – and that they will not abuse their dog (intentionally or unknowingly) in the process, and that if they have any complaints about the service they receive, these will be dealt with effectively – with an appeals process if needed.

Also both behaviour and training are unregulated industries in the UK. Anyone can say they are a behaviourist or a trainer. This coupled has led to people setting up in business who have had no training, have no qualifications, and as a result, behave in ways that are ineffective, inhumane (often unknowingly), and are making problems worse or creating new ones. It has also led to ‘media professionals’ who appear in programmes, social media or their own channels giving advice that is taken as ‘expert’ but are no more than ineffective, or worse, abusive, entertainment.

This is having huge fallout – and as a result, there are now serious talks for regulation. This would be a huge step forward for the profession and for dogs – if it is done right.

The Charter’s goal is to call for regulation – but one that doesn’t disenfranchise the amazing people working out there already who are accredited and experienced, work with the most up-to-date methods and are making a real difference. Also that it doesn’t push the prices of getting help out of the reach of the dog owners who need it most – especially at a time when the cost of living is soaring, as has the number of dogs in the UK.

While we know what we would like the profession to look like in the future, the Charter recognises the realities of what we have now and how best to improve standards without negatively impacting dogs and their people in the process. The only way to do that, is to get the first steps right – and take each one at a time.

The Charter also aims to show that the industry can self-regulate, as we have seen in other sectors that if government make a snap decision, they do so with little to no industry knowledge and so legitimise the very people we should be standing against.

Why can't individuals be a member of the Dog Charter?

Part of the UK Dog Behaviour and Training Charter is about accountability. There are some amazing professionals out there doing life-changing things to help dogs and their people who do not belong to any organisation. There are also some terrible ones. Without external accreditation, the public can't tell the difference – especially if they come with a shiny website and excellent marketing.

Being an accredited member of an organisation means that someone has had their abilities and knowledge assessed, that they have agreed to adhere to a code of conduct, that they will keep their knowledge up to date - and that in the case of a complaint, there is a clear procedure that can be followed. Without being a member, there is no oversight – no matter how good someone is.

The UK Dog Behaviour and Training Charter is a cooperative umbrella group that allows both professionals and the public know which organisations are supporting their member professionals in this goal. As such, it is the organisations that are members not the individual.

Who is the UK Dog Behaviour and Training Charter?

The UK Dog Behaviour and Training Charter is a not-for-profit limited company. It was formed this way because it was important that the founding members had an equal stake in its direction and success – and had an equal voice.

As such, the chair or the head of each organisation is a voting director – with the legal responsibilities of such. There is also a chair who has a casting vote only and a non-voting treasurer.

One organisation, one vote. That sometimes makes meetings 'interesting' but it also means it is cooperative with no organisation or person having any more authority than any other. It also means that it keeps agendas and egos out of the equation.

Within the Dog Charter, behaviourists and trainers have the same standing as we have the same goals for the future.

These founding members have all taken the leap to work together for the good of the profession – and for dogs and their people – and spend their time and money doing just that.

The founding members are:

ACE (Animal Centred Education)
APDT (Association of Pet Dog Trainers)
CAPBT (COAPE Association of Pet Behaviourists and Trainers)
ICB (International Canine Behaviourists)
IMDT (Institute of Modern Dog Trainers)
Association of INTODogs
ISCP (International School for Canine Psychology and Behaviour)
PPG (Pet Professional Guild – British Isles)
VSA/VSPDT (Victoria Stilwell Academy/Victoria Stilwell Positively Dog Training)

The Charter also has non-voting member organisations who support the same ethos:

Ordinary Members:

NICE (National Institute for Canine Ethics)

Supporting Members:

Pet Remedy
Yellow Dog
Zigzag

Why do I not know about the UK Dog Behaviour and Training Charter?

Good question! Possibly because we don't waste money that we don't have on advertising campaigns or time on hit and miss social media postings and the resultant firefighting. The dog world on social media has got increasingly toxic, and as a professional umbrella organisation, the Charter is about boosting a positive, professional, accountable approach, not getting involved in internet scraps or industry competitiveness.

However, we would like to shout what we are about from the rooftops! What the Dog Charter does needs is every member – organisation or individual who has chosen to be a member of one of these visionary organisations because they believe in the Charter ethos – to start shouting about the Charter.

That's how we change minds and get the professional future that we want – and begin to change the lives of the UK's dogs.