

Animals in College Policy

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1. Introduction

1.1 The range of animals kept in schools can be very wide, including species of insects, crustaceans, fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds and small mammals. The educational value of having animals in and around college can be:

- The general beneficial effects on students;
- The creation of an awareness of the needs of animals and sensitivity towards them;
- A focus on scientific study/centre of interest;
- Training in pet care;
- Training in animal husbandry;
- Help with remedial education.

1 These educational values must be balanced against ethical concerns raised by keeping them in college. However, once the decision has been made to keep animals, it is important that they are provided with the most humane living conditions.

2 Pre-requisites

2.1 Before keeping any animal in the college, you must consider all alternative options, in some cases be sure that species' survival is not endangered, and be convinced that keeping a particular animal is the best way of achieving your objectives. In addition, you must:

- Have an understanding of the biology and natural history of the animal, thus being able to cater for its needs;
- Ensure its suitability for the students at the college and for your stated needs;
- Provide care during the week, weekends, bank holidays and all college holidays;
- Provide accommodation which is appropriate to the species, taking into consideration the mental and physical well-being of the animal and the need for adequate security. The housing must be designed to permit regular cleaning and the supply of food and fresh water. It must be designed and maintained to ensure that the animals contained within it do not escape or suffer injury or contract disease and its security discourages intruders or unwanted interference. It must be possible to provide temperature and humidity levels at which animals do not show distress or abnormal behaviours. Lighting, if required, should be as close as possible in duration and intensity to natural conditions, whilst not generating excess heat. Consider whether heating and lighting may be controlled differently at weekends to periods of normal college occupancy.
- Be prepared to arrange immediate veterinary treatment and advice in anticipation of the animal becoming injured or unwell, and cover for the care of the animals should you become unwell.
- Be familiar with the health and safety provisions for humans and animals.

- Have a planned programme of student involvement with the animals that is fair and balanced for the animals.
- Be aware of all statutory and legal obligations.
- Ensure that should you leave the college, someone else will be there to accept continuing responsibility for the animals should you not take them with you.

2.2 If, after a full review, it is decided that it is appropriate to purchase an animal and house it at the college, then in order for there to be minimal risk to humans of diseases being transmitted from animals kept in colleges, it is important that animals are obtained from accredited or high-quality sources.

Unless these are known to have originated from a reliable source, it will not be possible to be confident that they are disease-free.

3. Health and Hygiene Issues

3.1 Basic Precautions

Some types of animals present greater health, safety or hygiene risks than others. The majority of animals available through suppliers present no hazards that good hygiene procedures cannot address. Animals such as terrapins are unsuitable for college use due to living in warm and wet conditions and being carnivores. These conditions are ideal for salmonella to thrive and a bite from a terrapin can cause disease transference. When handling animals in any way:

- Do not consume food or drink;
- Cover any open cuts or wounds with waterproof adhesive dressings, and if particular risks exist, wear suitable protective gloves;
- Wash your hands with soap and water before and after working with animals;
- Be careful not to touch around your face, mouth and eyes in particular and skin in general whilst handling animals and before washing hands;
- Utensils, including bowls and water bottles should be thoroughly cleaned daily;
- Cages should have a regular programme of cleaning, which should be increased in periods of warm weather, to minimise risk of infection to animals;
- Wild animals in particular can transmit disease to caged stock and humans, so there must be no possibility of contact between college animals and other dead or alive wild animals;
- For the same reason, animal foodstuffs should be stored in sealed containers in rodent proof areas to prevent contamination. Foodstuffs should be stored below 18°C.

3.2 Veterinary Care

Before animals are acquired for college, the Principal, or designated alternative, should ensure provision is identified in the budget for veterinary care and a local veterinary practice be contacted for the college to register as a client.

The member of staff in charge of the animals should be responsible for making prior arrangements with a veterinary surgery, seeking advice or treatment where necessary, and the administration of any treatment that is prescribed following veterinary diagnosis. It is usual, and often most practical, for arrangements to be made for the sick animal to be taken in its cage for the consultation at the veterinary surgery. In the case of some animals, commercial carry cases are available that could be used instead.

The practice with which you register should be advised, understand and agree that in the case of a college animal being presented for treatment, an account should be rendered to the college's finance section.

It is also important that for weekends and holidays where parents of students have agreed to undertake care of the animals, that parents know the name, telephone number and surgery times of the college's veterinary practice. It is also important that parents are clear on the payment by the college of any veterinary expenses that arise.

3.3 Students' Health

3.3.1 Wounds - any puncture wounds such as those caused by bites and scratches should receive immediate medical attention. All regular handlers of animals should check on their cover against tetanus and if needed be immunised. In the case of students this means their parents will need advising accordingly.

3.3.2 Disease - Zoonotic diseases are those that can be passed between humans and animals and vice versa. Staff should be aware of what animals can be at risk and the symptoms of the disease they may transfer. They should also ensure that infected animals are immediately removed from the classroom. Should staff or students be infected, they should immediately seek medical treatment. There is a particular danger from wild rats and mice which carry diseases, such as Weil's disease, that can be fatal to humans.

3.3.3 Allergies - staff must also be aware that animals and associated materials such as bedding and foodstuffs, can sometimes cause distressing allergy sensitisation. This can take the form of running and smarting eyes, runny noses, rashes, hay fever, nut allergy and asthma-like attacks. These factors should be considered from college medical records and parental checks, when determining what animals you may keep and whether you intend to house them permanently in the classroom.

4. Care and Accommodation

4.1 Restrictions - Animals kept in colleges should be restricted to the species and numbers to which appropriate care and attention can be given at all times, including weekends and holidays.

4.2 Environmental Factors - Check the needs of the animals against the conditions which exist in the proposed housing area: heating, lighting, relative humidity, ventilation (including absence of draughts) and noise. Ensure that wild rodents and other potential animal threats do not have access to animal quarters or animal food.

4.3 Animal Rooms - Particular attentions must be paid to heating. Animal rooms should have alternative heating if college heating is turned off overnight or at weekends.

4.4 Caged Animals - must be kept in suitable accommodation for their species. This means putting animal welfare before convenience and cost. Many commercial cages are not adequate and the following requirements need taking into account when purchasing housing:

- Metal cages are prone to noise, coldness and rusting in some cases;
- Plastic cages can be warmer, quieter and more easily cleaned;
- Wooden cages may be prone to rot and are easily gnawed through, either internally leading escape or from outside invaders;
- Visibility, both for the animal to see out and for the student to observe the animal should be strongly taken into consideration in the housing provision.
- Stress factors for the animals can be reduced by providing secluded areas in the cage with hiding boxes or pipes.
- Bedding can provide extra insulation against temperature fluctuations.

In selecting animal accommodation, you should take into account your reasons for keeping animals in college. Consider whether your aims, such as teaching of responsibility of pet ownership and the observation of animals are best achieved by the cage design.

4.5 Social Grouping - Animals should not be caged singly unless they are known to fight. Hamsters are a prime example of this, although litter mates are usually alright if reared together continuously.

4.6 Fire Brigade and Police - Details of the location and type of animals should be kept in the college and be made available to both the Police and Fire Brigade. A designated person (persons) must have responsibility for the removal of the animal in the event of a fire.

5 Handing Over Responsibility

5.1 Before permanently leaving the college or stopping this role, the responsible person should formally, through the Principal, hand over the well-being of the animals to a designated successor. If they are unable to do this, the animals should either leave with that person, to be kept responsibly elsewhere, or be humanely destroyed (see RSPCA Guidelines).

6 Legislation

6.1 There are six main areas of parliamentary legislation which relate to the use of animals in educational establishments. These deal with issues that prohibit the abuse of animals, their abandonment, the legality of age for selling animals to students, cruelty, removal of animals from the wild and keeping of schedule listed animals without a licence. They are:

- Protection of Animals Act
- Abandonment of Animals Act
- Pet Animals Act
- Cruelty to Animals Act

- Wildlife and Countryside Act
- Dangerous Wild Animals Act

Further more details guidance on keeping and housing animals in colleges can be found via the CLEAPSS website.

7. Stuffed Animals in Colleges

If the college uses stuffed animals in displays, it is recommended that they should only use animals that have been provided by an approved source as these will have been appropriately tested and maintained.

You should be aware that animals stuffed during the Victorian period may have been preserved with arsenic.

In addition, you will need to be conscious of students who suffer with asthma or related conditions which may be triggered by contact with animal fur.