ANIMAL WELFARE EVIDENCE PLAN 2011/12

Evidence Plans are part of Defra’s business planning processes. They have been developed for each policy programme, ongoing function or hub with a substantial evidence base.

The main purposes of Evidence Plans are to help Defra policy and evidence teams to:
- Maintain a clear ‘line of sight’ between policy objectives and evidence needs;
- Ensure best use of others’ evidence and maximise opportunities for partnerships;
- Show a clear rationale and value for money for Defra investment in evidence;
- Prepare for policy evaluation.

1. POLICY RATIONALE

1.1 Policy context

Ministers are committed to improving standards of welfare of all kept animals, companion animals and livestock, on farm, during transport, at markets, and at slaughter. The work links to both the Coalition Agreement and Departmental Priority 1 in Defra’s Business Plan “Support and develop British farming and encourage sustainable food production” and so “help to enhance the competitiveness and resilience of the whole food chain, including farms and the fish industry, to ensure a secure, environmentally sustainable and healthy supply of food with improved standards of animal welfare”.

Animal welfare issues attract a very high level of public and political interest and consistently generate the largest “postbag” of all the issues dealt with by Defra. Concern ranges from the treatment of farm animals, companion animals, sport animals such as greyhounds and circus animals to the way seals are hunted and killed for their fur. There is a public expectation that the Government will address these concerns, with animal welfare recognised as a public good, as defined by Her Majesty’s Treasury, as being non-rival and non-excludable.

This is currently achieved through a broad suite of European and domestic legislation, much of it developed in the last ten years. Good welfare reduces the incidence of disease and mortality amongst farm animals which in turn contributes to a more competitive industry, a more sustainable food supply and a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

Key policy outcomes are to ensure that all kept animals are treated appropriately and humanely and that all those who interact with animals have the necessary skills and knowledge to meet their responsibility to ensure the welfare of their animals. This is achieved through the development and implementation of effective policies, the use of both non-regulatory and regulatory instruments, the development and application of risk-based controls, the enforcement of existing EU and domestic legislation, and by working with others to improve the welfare of animals, for example industry and non-Government organisations, in taking forward a Big Society approach.

Policy objectives are aligned with the need to base decisions on available evidence and practical experience rather than on subjective or emotional considerations. This is particularly relevant in the welfare field where there are very different opinions about what constitutes good welfare and possible policy options. The existence of this difference in view affects the both the availability and usefulness of alternative research funding. In addition, welfare objectives need to be considered alongside policy objectives in other...
areas, for example climate change, food security, scientific innovation and new animal management systems

In the short and long term, animal welfare legislation is likely to be largely driven at a European level including a recent increase in both European and OIE (World Organisation for Animal Health) interest in companion animals. The Commission is currently reviewing the Animal Welfare Action Plan and is considering proposals for future work, including welfare labelling [http://www.eupaw.eu/docs/Final%20Report%20EUPAW%20Evaluation.pdf]. A new slaughter regulation has been agreed [http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/welfare/slaughter/ce_proposal_animal_time_killing_en.htm] and a review of welfare in transport legislation is planned. The Council of Europe (CoE) has been considering new recommendations on fish farming and revising the cattle recommendations [http://www.coe.int/t/e/legal_affairs/legal_operation/biological_safety%2C_use_of_animals/farming/A_texts_documents.asp#TopOfPage]. The European Food Safety Authority has produced recent opinions on the welfare of pigs, dairy cows and meat chickens and these will be used to inform future EU welfare policy and legislation [http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/ahawtopics/topic/animalwelfare.htm?wtrl=01]. On a domestic level, the Department’s Business Plan sets as a priority the promotion of domestic food production, competitiveness and consumer confidence in food provenance with improved animal welfare standards, underpinned by a strongly risk based inspection regime [http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/about/what/documents/defra-businessplan-101108.pdf].

Other national issues of public concern, under the remit of the welfare policy team, include dangerous dogs, wild animals in travelling circuses, welfare concerns around cloning, and animal welfare in very large livestock units. A sound evidence base is required to underpin all our activities both at a national level and to influence European policy.

In terms of evaluation, a review of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 (AWA) has just been completed and work has been completed looking at welfare in transport regulation. We are planning a post-implementation review of the new broiler legislation. In addition a full review of the animal welfare research and development programme was completed in March 2010 [www.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/farmanimal/welfare/onfarm/documents/110126-welfare-research-review.pdf] and the Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC), in their draft strategic plan for 2011 – 2015 (not yet finalised or published), have suggested that a future report on welfare evidence would be useful.

The research programme funding covers England and Wales, with Scotland funded separately. However a close working relationship is maintained among all Devolved Administrations with potential gaps and overlaps addressed at an early stage.

2. CURRENT STATE OF KNOWLEDGE, INVESTMENT AND FUTURE REQUIREMENTS

2.1 Current state of knowledge

Animal welfare science is a relatively new discipline and there has been a large increase in research knowledge developed over the last 15 to 20 years. The UK has played a key role in this and has funded projects on welfare concerns on a species/animal basis (poultry, pigs, ruminants, fish, companion animals and gamebirds) and in the cross cutting areas of welfare at slaughter, during transport and at markets. The main drivers for Defra funding of animal welfare research has been; to provide evidence for use in negotiations in the
development and revision of EU legislation and CoE recommendations; to investigate management and husbandry practices to improve the welfare of farmed animals under commercial conditions and, to a lesser extent, to provide evidence to address public and/or Ministerial concerns on specific issues including welfare education and knowledge transfer.

Therefore there is a broad evidence base for current EU legislation, for example, for welfare in transport and at slaughter, and to support specific EU legislation for calves, pigs, laying hens and meat chickens. Among specific areas of research funded by this programme are the transport conditions required for optimum welfare in various species, stocking densities in meat chickens, the use of manipulable materials for pigs, humane killing and slaughtering methods and the welfare aspects of different laying hen, cattle and pig production systems. The evidence base for farmed fish welfare in different management systems, including at slaughter, is increasing but is still in its early stages.

Evidence is lacking on the interactions between welfare and sustainability, climate change and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, and food security, and more generally on the barriers existing to uptake by farmers and keepers of the information currently available. However it is recognised that, for example, the work done in other programmes to assess the reasons for uptake (or lack of uptake) of advice on environmental issues may be applicable for welfare and affect the need for primary research in this areas. In addition there is currently a lack of clear evidence on how to assess the benefits delivered by improved welfare in terms of value to society, although some work has already been commissioned in this area.

The scope of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 to cover all kept animals has emphasised the need for further information in other species such as companion animals and gamebirds, but the evidence base is less well developed than for farmed animals. The evidence for specific welfare issues, for example mutilations in farmed animals (tail docking in pigs and lambs, castration in pigs and lambs, beak trimming in poultry, the management and husbandry of gamebirds) is mixed and further work is required. In addition there are gaps in a number of specific areas, for example, welfare outcomes in very large livestock units, on farm culling methods, emergency killing, fin damage in farmed fish and transport of fish.

Key information sources


Research requirements of recommendations for the welfare of farmed animals of the CoE http://www.coe.int/t/e/legal_affairs/legal_co-operation/biological_safety%2C_use_of_animals/farming/A_texts_documents.asp#TopOfPage
Reports and opinions from the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)

Reports of Animal Health welfare inspections – Annual reports to Commission, CVO report, National Control Plan
http://www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/uknationalcontrolplan.pdf

2.2 Primary objectives of evidence activities
The primary policy objective is to improve standards of welfare for kept animals and to ensure implementation and enforcement of welfare legislation. This is complicated by the fact that the concept of ‘improved welfare’ is an open ended one, with society’s views of what good welfare means changing both as further evidence is collected on the welfare needs of animals and as information on, for example, new and current farming systems is disseminated. There is a need to understand more on the economic value placed on welfare by the public. Evidence requirements to fulfil the primary policy objective are obtained by various means – welfare inspection on-farm, at transport and at slaughter; welfare surveillance and; welfare R&D. The evidence obtained allows us to assess areas of public or Ministerial concern, develop and implement policy options, negotiate with evidence in international fora, monitor welfare trends over time, provide information on the welfare implications of other policy areas and provide assurance to the Commission and Food and Veterinary Office that legislative requirements are being met.

Welfare R&D
This is needed to generate evidence to; 1) influence decisions and proposals at the European level, for example recent reports from EFSA on pigs, dairy cows and meat chickens will have a bearing on future welfare legislative changes for these species and extensively used Defra funded research. In addition the Commission is currently considering welfare labelling; 2) address the gaps identified by the recent welfare research review for example on understanding the hiatus between available information, farmer behaviour change and knowledge transfer; 3) address the recommendations by FAWC in reports and opinions on different species( pigs, lambs, gamebirds) and their landmark report on Animal Welfare; Past, Present and Future; 4) address the gap between evidence and subjective views; 5) address the gaps in the relationship between climate change and animal welfare (as little research on climate change has focussed on or considered animal welfare), and food policy/security and animal welfare.

Welfare inspections
Animal Health (AH) carries out welfare inspections on-farm in order to comply with EU legislation and to respond to allegations of poor welfare. Local authorities and Animal Health inspect welfare in markets and in transport. The Food Standards Agency (FSA) Operations Group inspects welfare at slaughter. The primary objectives of the surveillance activities are to comply with EU requirements and recognise and intervene where poor welfare is noted.

Welfare surveillance
The Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA) supply information on a quarterly basis to policy and delivery within Government on welfare issues arising on - farm brought to
their attention by private veterinary surgeons, AH veterinary officers and FSA official veterinarians. This information informs policy on basic welfare issues, element of education/knowledge transfer of farmers and food producers and helps with future policy development and prioritisation of research needs, both informally as specific issues arise and formally as part of the decision making process on evidence needs.

2.3 Current investment in evidence

R&D

The AW R&D programme is managed under the following four policy areas:

- **On-farm welfare** – understanding the welfare needs of livestock on-farm, primarily pigs, poultry, ruminants and fish, and how these needs can be met in the various farm systems used in the UK e.g. free-range or intensive farms.

- **Welfare at slaughter** – this sub-programme seeks to address concerns about the welfare of animals at the time of slaughter or killing, and to minimise the risk of stress or suffering. The research also considers how meat quality and high welfare can both be achieved.

- **Welfare during transport and at markets** – understanding the effect of transport and markets on stress levels and body condition, and how such effects can be minimised.

- **Companion animal and Game bird welfare** – investigating specific issues relating to companion animals including issues which other funders will not or, due to conflict of interest, cannot fund e.g. the use of electronic training aids in dogs.

Since the introduction of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 Defra now has responsibilities for the welfare of Game birds. Currently there is little known about the welfare needs of these semi-wild birds being reared in captivity.

In March 2010 a review of the AW R&D programme from 2005-2010 was conducted to:

1. Evaluate completed and current research projects in relation to their scientific quality, usefulness to policy and contribution to the evidence base, and delivery of the overall objectives of the Animal Welfare R&D programme.
2. Assess the size, scope and balance of the current programme in relation to current policy needs
3. Consider the future direction of the R&D programme and identify future priorities, taking into account the size, scope and balance of the current programme as well as research funded by other sponsors.

This review provided assurance on the robustness of the evidence being delivered and the appropriateness of the research funded, as well as assisting in identifying areas of mature science and areas of uncertainty.

Mature Science

The peer-reviewers identified Slaughter and Transport as areas where the science was relatively mature and in coming years less research would be required, with much of the future investment relating to Knowledge Transfer to the industry.

Areas of uncertainty

- Knowledge Transfer was identified as a gap by peer-reviewers. Similar to other areas of Defra R&D, there is uncertainty as to why animal handlers do not adopt changes that have been proven to improve welfare. There is a need to conduct more social science research to understand how best to communicate evidence and effect behavioural change, linking to lessons learned and information available on the
environment side

- The impact of climate change on the welfare of the animal species and breeds kept in the UK is an area of uncertainty. In addition to conducting research on AW in relation to climate change, it will be important in coming years to link into mitigation and adaptation research in other parts of Defra to ensure that new climate change strategies have considered the implications to Animal Welfare.
- The Animal Welfare Act 2006 has brought the welfare of additional species under the responsibility of Defra. For some species there is little evidence on their welfare requirements and research will therefore be required e.g. Game birds.
- Climate change and the increasing global population impacts on the security of our food supply. Increased demand for animal-derived food products is likely to drive more farmers to employ more intensive farming methods; the welfare requirements in new production systems will require research to ensure a sustainable food supply without compromising welfare standards.

In all of these areas there is scope for closer links with work being carried out in other Defra programmes, for example in Farming for the Future and climate change programmes.

Non-R&D / Surveillance
VLA conduct welfare surveillance of new and emerging problems on farm
FSA Operations Group conduct inspections at abattoir which provide evidence of welfare standards on-farm, at transport and at slaughter.

Research and policy teams meet regularly to discuss issues relating to evidence. Information arising from surveillance activities will be used to inform potential new evidence needs.

Animal Health Inspections
Further relevant evidence which is invested from the wider Defra family are Animal Health welfare inspections. This investment is via Defra’s contract with our Delivery Agents Animal Health and is therefore detailed further under 4.2.

Current and future Government financing constraints may limit maintenance of non-statutory inspection and surveillance work.

2.4 Identifying and prioritising new evidence needs

The current animal welfare research programme has the aim of providing evidence to achieve; 1) the Government’s stated priority to “help to enhance the competitiveness and resilience of the whole food chain, including farms and the fish industry, to ensure a secure, environmentally sustainable and healthy supply of food with improved standards of animal welfare”; 2) assurance that our involvement in negotiations on welfare legislative proposals emerging from the Commission or guidelines produced by the OIE are effective; 3) assurance that the animal welfare inspection regime fulfils EU statutory requirements; 4) evidence based welfare policy and not emotion based welfare policy.

Defra commissions R&D in support of these outcomes to ensure that policy initiatives are soundly based and to support the UK’s position in Community negotiations.
Evidence priorities are identified through a number of channels

- The Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) is an Expert Committee advising Ministers on animal welfare issues and its recommendations help to inform the Defra animal welfare research programme.
- The Companion Animal Welfare Council (CAWC) is an independent body producing reports and opinions on welfare issues affecting the companion animal sector.
- Research review meetings are held on a cyclical basis across all aspects of the programme involving internal and external peer reviewers and a broad invited audience to identify knowledge gaps and the requirements to fill them (most recent review March 2010).
- Consultation between the policy and research team and use of information on emerging national and international welfare issues – using intelligence gleaned from EU and international contacts, industry, Non Government Organisations (NGOs), welfare research scientists and other expert opinion.
- Recommendations for research stated in EFSA opinions, themselves an indication of possible future EU legislative proposals.
- Value for money considerations in proposed research projects, including interest of alternate or collaborative funders, use of competitive tender and peer review process.
- Assessment of proposed research needs on welfare concerns against the number of animals affected, the duration of the welfare problem and its impact on each of the 5 freedoms and whether improvement is achievable and measurable.
- Close collaboration with Government colleagues working on policy areas with animal welfare implications, for example, climate change mitigation and adaptation, food security, food labelling, exotic and endemic animal disease, CAP reform.
- Ministerial and public interest and concerns in specific welfare issues.

A comprehensive systematic formal review of the full welfare research programme was undertaken in 2010 and the results of that review will help to inform the prioritised research plan. However new evidence needs continue to be assessed on an ongoing basis using the channels identified above.

Other funders do contribute to welfare research, for example farming industry organisations, charities such as the Tubney Trust and welfare NGOs such as the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and opportunities have been taken for co-funding with Defra either as ‘in kind’ or cash contributions for many projects. However the advantage and importance of Defra funded research in the animal welfare area is that it is trusted by others whatever their views.

Areas of uncertainty are summarised in 2.3.

### 2.5 Secondary benefits of evidence activities

Research conducted under the animal welfare research programme primarily benefits all kept animals as a better understanding of their welfare needs is gained; it offers the
farming industry an opportunity to develop the competitive advantage of a quality product; it provides consumers with transparent evidence based information on the welfare provenance of their food; and supports the negotiation, implementation and enforcement of proportionate risk-based EU controls.

The programme links with research and work being carried out in other Defra policy areas including climate change, the promotion of increased domestic food production, knowledge transfer and behavioural change, animal disease including bovine tuberculosis and the review of existing farm regulations. There are also benefits for other Departments, for example the Home Office (on unsocial behaviour around status and dangerous dogs, and the new Animal Scientific Procedures legislation) and Communities and Local Government on their work on the ‘Big Society’.

Knowledge exchange with partners, stakeholders and customers is facilitated by a requirement for all research proposed to include clear indications of plans for knowledge transfer and publications (both peer and non-peer reviewed). Farm assurance schemes (including RSPCA Freedom Foods) benefit from evidence on which to base their welfare standards.

A strong welfare research programme ensures that the capability of research suppliers and provision for expert advice and opinion is maintained.

2.6 Alignment to long-term evidence challenges and Reform Plan objectives

The evidence activity contributes directly to Priority 1 of the Defra Business Plan “Support and develop British farming and encourage sustainable food production “ and so “help to enhance the competitiveness and resilience of the whole food chain, including farms and the fish industry, to ensure a secure, environmentally sustainable and healthy supply of food with improved standards of animal welfare” (see 2.4)

Welfare research also may link to Priority 2 “help to enhance the environment and biodiversity to improve quality of life” and so “enhance and protect the natural environment, including biodiversity and the marine environment, by reducing pollution and preventing habitat loss and degradation” - by providing, for example, evidence on use of extensive farming systems, conservation grazing, management of farmed fish and continuous housing systems.

The welfare evidence activities support a number of Defra’s ‘Licence to Operate’ activities, for example, the implementation and enforcement of welfare directives and legislation, emergency management in disease outbreaks, timely and accurate payments to farmers.

There is also a strong contribution to the challenges identified by the Evidence Investment Strategy;

- Climate change – livestock emissions are recognised as a significant contributor to greenhouse gases, mitigation and adaptation strategies (for example in the housing or feeding of farm animals) may have welfare implications, enhanced welfare leads to reduction in disease (pathogen survival may be affected by climate change, healthy animals have higher production so fewer needed), further information is needed on potential conflicts between policy objectives on animal welfare and climate change work
- Sustainable food supply – animal production systems have an effect on food
conversion rate, possible increase in ‘intensive’ systems for various species and welfare implications, enhanced need for farmers to understand knowledge already available on high welfare systems, competitiveness etc, further information is needed on potential conflicts between policy objectives on animal welfare and food security

- Protecting ecosystem services – use of conservation grazing, feral ponies, common land – welfare implications

3. INTERNAL CAPABILITIES - USING DEFRA’S EVIDENCE SPECIALISTS

3.1 Range of knowledge disciplines needed

**Veterinary scientific** expertise encompasses knowledge of health, disease, animal behaviour and management, livestock systems, immunology etc and is needed to identify welfare concerns and advise on future evidence policy needs, assess research proposals, monitor ongoing research, assess interim and final research reports, liaise with contractors, delivery agents, industry and NGOs on concerns and information presented, translate evidence into a form suitable for policy colleagues and Ministers to understand and use.

**Welfare research scientists** with in depth knowledge of ethology, physiology, which address specific issues including welfare concerns, UK and EU research infrastructure, strategy, funding mechanisms and evidence assurance and are required to help identify research needs, place and manage research contracts and manage a prioritised and value for money programme that meets policy requirements.

**Economists** are required to balance the costs and benefits of welfare policy options. The valuation of welfare benefits is difficult and is currently centred on the willingness of the consumer to pay more for a higher welfare product – ongoing work is looking at this gap.

**Social researchers** are increasingly being used in welfare research, providing guidance and input on projects on motivation, behaviour change, willingness to pay, assessment of welfare interventions, drivers for change

**Statisticians** provide expert advice on validity of evidence, robustness of experimental design and scale of project (eg numbers of animals, tests etc) to produce significant results

**Natural scientists** may be a future need if the gaps on cross cutting work between welfare and sustainability and food security are to be addressed

3.2 Access to internal specialists

The animal welfare research programme currently has access to veterinary and scientific expertise (G6, VA, SSO and HSO level), with economists, social researchers and statisticians available to consult when required
3.3 Future resource needs and filling gaps in expertise

The need for veterinary and scientific expertise will continue, but resource has reduced in year with the loss of the Senior Civil Service welfare consultant post. Knowledge transfer and succession planning are in place within the programme, but there are risks associated with the loss of specialists with a long standing background in the area.

It is anticipated that greater use will be made of economists, statisticians and social researchers in understanding the means to achieve behaviour change, influencing consumer choice and the barriers to purchase of ‘high welfare’ products, gaining more clarity on both the tangible and intangible benefits of improved animal welfare and in using available data more effectively. These specialists are currently shared with other research programmes.

4. EXTERNAL KNOWLEDGE SUPPLY AND PARTNERS

4.1 Strategic external capabilities and suppliers

R&D
As research expertise is built up over many years it is necessary to ensure research capability is maintained so as to be available when required.

While a large number of contractors deliver UK-relevant animal welfare research, the key suppliers in recent years have been the Scottish Agricultural College (SAC) and the University of Bristol. However communication is maintained with all current and potential suppliers through attendance at conferences, seminars, review meetings, stakeholder groups, personal communications and joint attendance on various project steering groups. In addition the use of open competition and peer review for all contracts ensures contact is maintained with all potential suppliers.

Surveillance
Surveillance needs have to date been met by AH, VLA, FSA Operations Group and Local Authorities.

4.2 Leverage and partnerships

- **Animal Health** – AH conduct cross-compliance and on-farm welfare inspections under their contract with Defra. These include welfare assessments, providing valuable evidence on current welfare standards in England and Wales.
- **Welsh Assembly Government (WAG)** – as Defra’s R&D budget covers both England and Wales our partnership with WAG is of paramount importance. WAG colleagues are involved in setting research priorities, invited to comment on research proposals prior to commissioning and invited to project meetings on which they have expressed an interest.
- **Scottish Government (SG)** – SG hold a separate budget for AW research and surveillance; close collaboration is therefore maintained to prevent duplication of effort and ensure responsibilities for shared priorities are assigned, or opportunities for co-funding explored e.g. SG recently took forward research into castration of sheep. SG colleagues are invited to meetings to discuss research priorities, invited to comment on research proposals prior to commissioning and invited to project meetings which they have expressed in.
- **Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), Northern Ireland**
– DARD do not currently fund AW research, however links are maintained to enable exchange of relevant information.

- **Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC)** – Mechanisms are in place so that Defra has opportunity to view all AW proposals submitted under the BBSRC responsive mode. Defra colleagues scrutinise these proposals to identify those relevant to Defra priorities; co-funding under the Government Partnership Award scheme from Defra increases chance of funding by BBSRC. To enable data sharing and prevent duplication of effort BBSRC colleagues are invited to programme reviews and other suitable events, and Defra attend reviews of BBSRC research.

- **National Centre for the 3Rs (Reduce, Refine, Replace) (NC3Rs)** – as above for BBSRC – opportunities to co-fund relevant research, and data sharing via programme reviews.

- **UK AW research funders forum** – currently been set up to bring together key AW research funders to ensure resources are targeted effectively. Secretariat at BBSRC.

- **Animal Health European Research Area NETwork (ERA-NET)** – the EU ERA-NET on Animal Health (EMIDA – Emerging and Major Infectious Diseases of Livestock) is being extended to include Animal Welfare. This will establish a formal process for identifying priorities and co-funding of AW research across Europe. EMIDA is co-ordinated by colleagues within the Veterinary Research Unit (VRU) in the Food and Farming Group within Defra.

- **Ad hoc meetings** with AW funders and policy makers worldwide to exchange knowledge, and discuss research priorities and co-funding opportunities e.g. UK / New Zealand Bilateral meeting, June 2010; UK / The Netherlands bilateral meeting, July 2010.

- **Tubney Trust** – this charity currently funds a large amount of applied AW research and Knowledge Transfer, and provides substantial funding to welfare researchers at Bristol University. However the budget of this charity is time-limited and cannot therefore be relied upon to support welfare research in the long term.

- **Industry** – Maintenance of close links with industry ensures research is relevant and enables leverage of co-funding and in-kind contributions. Many research groups are proactive in involving the relevant industry contacts in project steering meetings.

Other potential partners to address research gaps may include Living with Environmental Change and this will be explored. In addition a more structured way of further harnessing the potential of the Big Society way of working will be examined.

### 4.3 Use and value of advisory bodies and external specialist advisers

The key Advisory bodies of relevance to Animal Welfare are:

- **Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC)** – formerly independent Government Advisory Body, now an Expert Committee
- **Companion Animal Welfare Council (CAWC)** – has received some Government funding in the past.

FAWC is comprised of individuals with expert welfare knowledge in various disciplines including veterinary practitioners, farmers, academics, consumer representation, industry and ethics. They supply independent advice to Ministers, keep under review the welfare of farm animals on agricultural land, at market, in transit and at slaughter and advise the Government of any legislative or other changes necessary. The Council produce reports, opinions and letters either at the request of Ministers (including the
Devolved Administrations) or on issues they themselves have recognised as a public concern or welfare issue. FAWC has recently been subject to independent review which concluded that their work was valuable and necessary.

External ‘deep’ specialists
The R&D programme makes extensive use of ‘deep’ specialists in peer-reviewing research proposals to ensure they are of a high scientific quality and do not duplicate completed or on-going research, thereby ensuring value for money. Peer-review of final reports is also conducted where the results of a project are likely to result in a significant change in practice or policy, and where projects are highly political. Finally, the periodic review of the research programme, last held in March 2010, employs experts in the field to appraise each project and comment on the quality and relevance of the work.

Policy colleagues also make use of ‘deep’ specialists, primarily via the expertise of the FAWC which is composed of ~18 farm animal welfare experts.

5. MEETING NEW EVIDENCE NEEDS

5.1 Overall approach to meeting your evidence needs

Our overall approach to meeting our R&D evidence needs follows standard Defra procedures

The exact prioritisation and specification of welfare research needs will be determined following discussions between animal welfare policy and veterinary staff, the Farm Animal Welfare Council, industry and NGO contacts, EU colleagues, other specialists such as economists, social researchers, other Defra and Other Government Department specialists as appropriate and relevant and by the output and recommendations of the recent welfare research review. The prioritisation of needs to be taken forward will be assessed in line with available budget and discussion with potential partners.

Research needs thus identified will be procured either through open competition or direct commissioning, with open competition as the default position. All applications will be peer reviewed externally regardless of procurement route.

Final reports will be peer reviewed where appropriate and revised if necessary prior to publication on the Defra web-site. Researchers are also strongly encouraged to publish their results in peer reviewed journals. The goal is to fund high quality scientific research that informs policy decisions and also maintains necessary expertise in the UK.

Project level - Projects are monitored by annual reports, regular site visits and by advisory groups for larger projects or those projects requiring more steer from Defra and/or stakeholders.

How will you ensure, where appropriate, a multi- and inter-disciplinary approach to your evidence activities?

The Farm Animal Welfare Council is composed of independent members from industry, academia, welfare science, welfare organisations and social science and they help
advise on where a multi- or inter-disciplinary approach is needed. In addition the welfare policy and veterinary staff maintain excellent contacts with research teams in the UK.

This will result in a clear description in the specification of research need of the approaches expected with a clear outline of how researchers will work together.

**How will you ensure value for money from your investments?**

Peer review of all project proposals (Value for Money is a specific question we ask peer reviewers to consider) and close monitoring of projects to ensure that the project does not drift off course and also that researchers can, when feasible, adjust projects mid-stream in the light of new findings and/or policy priorities.

**When deciding evidence priorities, how will you ensure risks are adequately assessed and addressed?**

All R & D is inherently risky and a balance needs to be struck across a research portfolio between short-term projects to address immediate needs and longer term projects which lay the foundations for short urgent pieces of work to address specific policy needs. A balance is also needed between low risk projects that may not be very insightful and more ambitious projects which carry a higher risk of failure.

Using independent advice and internal expertise decisions are taken on how crucial a particular project is and the consequences of a failure to provide a result or the implications of Defra basing decisions on an erroneous result.

To mitigate these risks regular monitoring of projects is carried out to determine if they are on track in terms of deliverables and also if the quality of the output is fit for purpose particularly as the purpose may have changed from the time when the project was commissioned.

Another risk that is considered in creating and managing a research portfolio is the possibility of an unexpected result that contradicts the status quo and possibly Defra policy. Such results should be seen as opportunities and courage is needed not to shy away from asking questions that could lead to awkward answers.

The risks of not doing research include lack of evidence to inform negotiations on future legislation that may disadvantage UK farmers, maintenance of the status quo in a farm production or management system that produces poor welfare outcomes for the animals and lack of a robust welfare outcome based system to monitor trends in welfare improvements.

**How do you see existing links with other funders/partners developing, and what additional partnership opportunities might you explore? How will you measure the success of partnership working in the future?**

We will work closely with the BBSRC who fund less applied research in this area and will seek to influence their attitude towards and funding of welfare related work. We maintain close links with potential NGO research funders, for example the Tubney Trust and look for opportunities for joint funding with industry. VRU lead on the Animal Health European Research Area NETwork (ERANET) which allows coordination of animal
health research across European countries and from next year will be incorporating a strong welfare component into their work.

We have joint funded work with the Netherlands and New Zealand and will continue to liaise with other countries

How will you assure yourself of the quality/robustness of the evidence you invest in directly and evidence you use from other (internal and external)

The scientific quality of our research is assessed by peer review before during and after the project by our advisory group internal experts and additional external peer reviewers as necessary.

How will you ensure evidence is used appropriately to inform your policy area and communicated effectively to appropriate customers? How will you evaluate the impact of evidence you invest in?

Extensive meetings between contractors, VRU and the welfare team to ensure that project results are transmitted and where appropriate interpreted for use in a policy context. This close relationship also allows feedback of changing policy priorities from welfare to the researchers during a project which can allow for projects to be altered.

5.2 Evidence investment forecast

As described under section 2.3, there are still significant areas of uncertainty in our understanding of the welfare needs of kept animals. Climate change, food security and changes in the UK economy can all impact upon the welfare of animal in food-production. The Animal Welfare Act 2006 has brought additional species under Defra’s responsibility, about which we have little information on their welfare requirements in captivity. EU legislative proposals are informed by EFSA opinions and several recent welfare opinions on different species and welfare concerns have been published. These opinions have highlighted gaps where key information is not available. There are also gaps in our understanding of how to communicate welfare issues, both to those who keep animals and to consumers wishing to purchase welfare-friendly products.

Since 1992/93 the AW research budget has been reduced from > £5 million to < £3 million and has been further reduced following the Comprehensive Spending Review. Given inflation and the introduction of Full Economic Costing for all projects, the current budget funds substantially less than previously.

Surveillance carried out by VLA and FSA Operations totals approximately £200k per annum and is expected to be broadly maintained.

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