

## **Animal Welfare Experts Call on all UK Organisations to Show Responsible Behaviours to Help Tackle Health and Welfare Crisis Caused by Brachycephaly (flat-faced) in Dogs**

- **All UK organisations and their employees must play their part in protecting dogs from the harms caused by having a flat-faced body shape in dogs.**
- **BWG has laid out a series of responsible behaviours that welfare-minded organisations can commit to applying.**
- **The general public can use these responsible behaviours to assess the welfare actions of organisations.**

The UK Brachycephalic Working Group (BWG) has launched a bold initiative to help address the serious health and welfare challenges often faced by dogs with brachycephalic (flat-faced) conformation. Aimed at ensuring a brighter future for these beloved pets, the initiative calls for industry-wide commitment by all UK organisations to show responsible behaviours and greater awareness of the associated health issues linked to the flat-faced body shape in dogs.

At the core of the BWG vision is a world where no dog ever again suffers from health problems caused by selective breeding for the flat-faced (brachycephalic) trait. The flat-faced conformation, often found in popular breeds such as English Bulldogs, Pugs, and French Bulldogs, is linked to significant respiratory and other health complications that can severely impact a dog's quality of life. These issues, which include difficulty breathing, eye problems, and overheating, have been exacerbated by ongoing breeding for extreme body shapes and by huge public demand for these dogs resulting in mass importation of puppies from abroad.

Sadly, many dogs of these flat-faced breeds, particularly when bred with exaggerated features to achieve a certain look that is popularised by celebrity and social media trends, also suffer from multiple other extreme body shapes such as skin folds, spinal deformity and congenital short tails. People looking for these breeds are strongly encouraged to make more informed buying choices, which would include ensuring that the parents of any potential puppy have been tested for a breathing condition called Brachycephalic Obstructive Airway Syndrome (BOAS), which can be assessed using The Kennel Club and University of Cambridge's Respiratory Function Grading (RFG) scheme.

The BWG was set up in 2016 to improve flat-faced dog welfare and is made up of veterinary, charity, breed club, kennel club, university and government organisations. BWG is determined to ensure the health and welfare of these dogs also becomes a top priority for all other organisations in the UK. Despite their long list of serious potential health problems, flat-faced dog breeds remain popular and desirable to own amongst the British public. Despite wide sharing of this health information over the past decade, many people remain unaware of these health problems and the importance of not acquiring a dog with extreme body shape. This low public awareness has significantly delayed

progress towards the BWG vision of a world where no dog experiences health-related welfare problems attributable to having been selectively bred for the flat-faced (brachycephalic) conformation. However, BWG believes that this goal can still be achieved with commitment for responsible behaviours from all UK organisations.

To catalyse this change, the BWG has outlined a comprehensive set of actions that all BWG member organisations have pledged to adopt. BWG now calls on all other UK organisations who care in any way about canine welfare to similarly pledge to adhere to these commitments. These actions not only aim to tackle the welfare issues brachycephalic dogs suffer directly, but they also aim to promote a shift in societal attitudes away from acquiring dogs with extreme physical traits.

Key commitments to redress the serious welfare issues caused by brachycephaly in dogs:

1. Commit to explicitly stating the health and welfare of dogs is a high priority for the work of that organisation.
2. Commit to working collaboratively with other welfare-focused organisations to resolve the brachycephalic health and welfare crisis in dogs.
3. Commit to full compliance with all relevant national legislation in relation to brachycephaly and extreme conformation in dogs.
4. Commit to applying scientific evidence-based principles in all decision-making in relation to brachycephaly in dogs.
5. Commit to support increased genetic diversity which may include controlled and appropriate outcrossing where necessary to promote less extreme conformation in dogs where there is adequate supporting evidence for health and welfare gains. Note: *The Bulldog Breed Council Member Clubs, the French Bulldog Breed Clubs and the Pug Breed Clubs are currently not in a position to commit to supporting outcrossing.*
6. Commit to never using imagery of dogs with brachycephaly for advertising unless such use is aimed specifically at protecting the health and welfare of dogs in relation to brachycephaly.
7. Commit to widely sharing a public message of 'Stop and think before buying a flat-faced dog.'
8. Commit to support training and education within their own memberships on the health and welfare issues related to brachycephaly.

The BWG calls on all organisations, businesses, and individuals concerned with the welfare of dogs to join this important movement and adopt these same BWG principles. By taking action together, the BWG believes it is possible to safeguard the future of brachycephalic dogs and eliminate the health issues they face.

“Moving away from normalisation of extreme body shapes in dogs requires active commitment from everyone who cares about dogs to finally say ‘No more’ to this suffering,” says Dan O’Neill, Chair of the BWG. “These new BWG commitments finally make it explicit how organisations should behave to protect future dogs from having extreme body shapes – there are no longer any excuses for being part of the problem rather than the solution.”

Victoria Phillips, Veterinary Surgeon Manager at Dogs Trust says, “Extreme conformation, including brachycephaly, is one of the biggest welfare challenges for dogs in the UK right now. All dogs deserve to have a life worth living, so Dogs Trust fully supports these commitments from the BWG, which provide practical guidance to supporting the change that’s urgently needed.”

For more information about the Brachycephalic Working Group and to read the full BWG position statement, please visit [ukbwg.org.uk](http://ukbwg.org.uk)

Full title of the BWG Position: Organisational Commitments to Responsible Behaviours aimed at Redressing the Serious Welfare Issues from Brachycephaly in Dogs.

**ENDS**

**Notes to editors**

**Information on the Brachycephalic Working Group** [www.ukbwg.org.uk](http://www.ukbwg.org.uk)

The BWG comprises leading UK dog welfare bodies, veterinary organisations, the Kennel Club, scientific & social researchers and breed clubs. The group aims to improve the health and welfare of brachycephalic (flat-faced) dogs by working together to improve the conformation-related health of individual dogs as well as reducing the current trend towards rising demand for these dogs. These aims are being approached by a series of actions that target the brachycephalic welfare issue at several points.

The BWG includes representatives of all major stakeholders in dog welfare in the UK. These include:

- Academia – Royal Veterinary College, University of Cambridge
- Breed clubs – Bulldog, French Bulldog, Pug
- Veterinary profession – British Veterinary Association (BVA), British Small Animal Veterinary Association (BSAVA)
- The Kennel Club
- Animal charities – Dogs Trust, PDSA, Blue Cross
- Owners, Breeders, Veterinary surgeons