



Summary of the Opinion of the FRCAW on canine educational practices and their impacts on the welfare of dogs

Full title: Opinion of the FRCAW – Summary of the Report ‘Opinion of the FRCAW concerning the impacts of canine educational tools and practices on the welfare of dogs’

Requested by: Animal Welfare Office, DGAL (French Directorate General for Food)

Date of referral: 26/02/2021

Opinion issued by FRCAW (French Reference Centre for Animal Welfare) on: 04/07/2022

Background as defined by the requesting body:

‘At the start of 2020, the French Minister for Agriculture and Food announced 15 measures to strengthen the fight against animal abuse. Nearly all focused on farm animals, but in one measure, the parliamentary representative Loïc Dombrevail was tasked with a mission to propose pathways for the improvement of the welfare of companion animals and equids. One of Deputy Dombrevail’s recommendations was the creation of an ongoing list of educational and training practices that should be banned.

Pinch (or prong) collars and electric collars were specifically mentioned as causing unnecessary suffering, and are, moreover, banned in other countries.

The priority is therefore to objectify the impacts of these collars in terms of animal health and welfare (pain and stress in particular) and to carry out an expert review of their usefulness in relation to the anticipated outcomes (effects on an animal’s behaviour) and by comparison with other training methods that are more respectful of animals, in France or elsewhere. On this basis, proposals may be made concerning the management of these methods, or even the creation of a regulatory framework (proposals should indicate which methods should be banned, which should be authorised subject to conditions, etc.)

The FRCAW will be able to expand this study to include other methods employed by dog-training professionals that are likely to cause unnecessary suffering.’

Request as defined by the commissioning body

‘The expertise of the FRCAW is sought to evaluate training methods for dogs and the suffering or stress that they can cause. The Opinion may serve as an aid to decision-making, should further legal regulation of these practices be desired.’



Revised formulation of the question by the FRCAW

The FRCAW confirms that an analysis of the possible impacts detrimental to dog welfare induced by the use of certain training methods lies within the scope of its missions. In response to the request, the FRCAW proposes that it should identify and examine the potential causes of pain and stress linked to the chief practices (and associated tools) employed for the education of dogs in France, along with the consequences of these practices for the welfare and behaviour of dogs. It also proposes to identify the available preventive measures to reduce the risks associated with canine educational practices.

The request will be addressed in three parts:

1. a mapping exercise to establish the main educational tools and practices employed in France for dogs;
2. an examination of factors affecting the welfare of animals and of their consequences for animal welfare;
3. a general assessment of tools and practices (advantages/disadvantages) and their conditions of use.

References:

- Article 7 (Training) of the European Convention for the Protection of Pet Animals issued by the Council of Europe: *‘No pet animal shall be trained in a way that is detrimental to its health and welfare, especially by forcing it to exceed its natural capacities or strength or by employing artificial aids which cause injury or unnecessary pain, suffering or distress’*.
- Article R 214-624 of the French Rural Code (Code Rural et de la Pêche Maritime) (Decree 2008-71 issued on 28 August 2008 concerning the protection of companion animals and modifying Art1-6, Paragraph 8): *‘The exercise of activities to educate and train an animal under conditions likely to inflict injury or unnecessary suffering on the animal is forbidden’*.
- European Convention for the Protection of Pet Animals (1987), signed by France in 1996 and ratified in 2003, formally published by Decree 2004-416 on 11 May 2004 ratifying the publication of the Convention.

Background to the Opinion

Details of the scoping definitions and the methodology employed in the expertise are provided in the report.

Main conclusion and recommendations

The purpose of this expertise was to characterise canine education in France along with the practices and tools associated with it, while shedding light on the possible consequences they may have for the welfare of dogs.

It is important to remember that the description of canine educational activities in this report is based on surveys of sample groups of canine professionals (including charities) and of owners, whose representative nature it has not been possible to test. An analysis of the geographic distribution of respondents reveals, in particular, the under-representation of certain French *départements*. It is possible that this study shows a recruitment bias towards respondents who are already sensitised on the topic of animal welfare.

The analysis carried out in this report would therefore be worth revisiting via a larger and more representative sample of the general population and/or observations on the ground. Notwithstanding this, much information of interest is discussed here.

1.1. Characterisation of canine educational activities in France

Canine educational practices in France, as revealed by this research, are performed, for the most part, by professionals with little experience (<5 years). They are undertaken by various professions, each with their own professional titles that notably take the behaviour of the dog into account (behavioural educator, educational and behavioural coach).

The forms of professional training reported by practitioners are as diverse as their titles, suggesting that a wide range and variety of practices are taught to professionals and potentially communicated to dog owners on the ground.

Recommendation 1: The FRCAW recommends that standards for the training of canine professionals should be identified and characterised. Guidelines for training advisors based on animal welfare could also be defined.

Should it be impossible to achieve this harmonisation of training, an ‘animal welfare’ label could *a minima* be awarded to training programmes where standards conform to a specified framework, to be devised, for the respect of animal welfare.

This report reveals that five breeds of dog are most frequently brought to canine education sessions (Australian Shepherds, Border Collies, German Shepherds, Belgian Shepherd Dogs, and Golden Retrievers), according to the respondents. These breeds are the most popular in

France and have greater needs in terms of physical and mental activity. In both rural and urban areas, canine education classes provide dogs with basic skills (particularly in the case of puppies) and achieve a reduction in behavioural problems (particularly for dogs over one year old), such as aggressiveness towards other dogs, fear, anxiety or stress associated with isolation.

Those who responded to the questionnaires (canine professionals and owners) have a view of human-dog relationships that is founded on companionship ¹. This encourages welfare in the animal because it involves a more frequent use of practices and tools associated with positive methods. However, some practices and tools associated with negative methods are still used. Coercive tools such as a shaker can containing pebbles or nails, or electric or choke collars, are used by dog owners on the advice of the professionals they have consulted. We can, however, observe that there has been a change in forms of punishment from physical to non-physical methods (a case in point being the isolation of a dog when it has exhibited inappropriate behaviour). Last, canine professionals state that they adapt their approach to each animal they work with, as only a few among them allocate a fixed number of sessions to achieve a particular educational/mitigation goal.

Recommendation 2: the FRCAW recommends that the findings of this report (a view of human-animal relationships based on companionship, the infrequent use of tools and practices associated with negative methods, the adaptation of the work of the professional to the individual dog) be confirmed through representative samples and/or observations on the ground before any conclusive picture of the canine educational landscape in France is proposed.

1.2. Use of educational practices and tools and their impacts on a dog's welfare

The FRCAW identified 11 practices and 24 tools, evidencing their impacts on the welfare of dogs by drawing on three bodies of knowledge:

- The available scientific literature on the subject
- The expertise of members of its network
- The views and experiences of respondents to a questionnaire (canine professionals and dog owners).

The stress-inducing factors relating to the practices and tools studied and their possible consequences for dogs are summarised in Tables 34 and 35. Factors were divided into two categories: methodological factors (inherent to the practice/tool or its manner of application) and individual factors (inherent to the dog).

¹ Human-animal relationships founded on a balance between the needs and expectations of the human and the dog.

Methodological stress factors associated with a practice/tool mostly take the following forms:

- Uses that are too lengthy, too frequent, or too intense
- Unpredictability of use
- Inappropriate use or inconsistent use in a given situation
- Poor construction, in the case of tools.

Individual stress factors associated with practices and tools mostly take the following forms in a dog:

- A fragile physique or physiology
- Physical and emotional sensitivity
- An anxious, fearful or emotional temperament
- Poor socialisation (with other dogs) or familiarisation (with humans or other animals).

Practices and tools were classified by the FRCAW experts according to their association with positive or negative methods on the basis of their most common use. This classification is, however, not absolute, nor is it applicable to all dogs, because the most important factor when determining the impact of a particular practice or tool on an animal is the response of the individual dog.

Recommendation 3: the FRCAW places strong emphasis on the importance of taking account of a dog's emotions with regard to the use of any practice or tool, so that any negative emotions in the dog can be minimised as far as possible. In this sense, it should be an absolute requirement that any action taken for the purpose of canine education must be adapted to each individual.

The list of 11 practices and 24 tools studied in this report is probably not comprehensive and the available scientific literature is incomplete on this topic.

Recommendation 4: The FRCAW recommends that the following studies should be conducted following the present expertise:

- a similar expertise on the practices and tools not dealt with in this report, in particular those used in training for particular purposes such as hunting and biting;
- observations on the ground, to fill the gaps in the scientific literature and to provide improved characterisations of the contexts in which practices and tools are employed during a canine education class;
- an assessment of the welfare of demonstration dogs and dogs used for purposes of control in canine education;
- a characterisation of the contexts of use for canine educational tools and practices outside canine education classes (directly by the owners). It would in fact appear that the majority of French citizens who use an electric collar (71.8%) do so without consulting a canine professional (Masson et al., 2018).



Recommendation 5: the FRCAW recommends that the relationship between a dog's degree of motivation to participate in canine educational sessions and its postures/behaviours during the sessions should be confirmed through observations on the ground.

Further, the behaviours associated with negative (and positive) emotions in dogs should be known by all canine professionals and owners of dogs, so that a dog's attendance at education classes can be suspended when it exhibits several of these behaviours. To this end, analysis of such behaviours could be included in the training requirements for professionals and awareness-raising information sheets on the subject could be produced for dog owners.

Where puppy schools are concerned, although dog owners express themselves to be satisfied, canine professionals are more qualified in their views. The impact of puppy schools on the welfare of the animals attending them is hard to objectify on the basis of the available scientific literature.

Recommendation 6: the FRCAW recommends that the practices employed by puppy schools should be studied in order to ensure that their influence on a puppy's socialisation and familiarisation is a positive one. If this is found to be the case, attendance at such establishments could be entirely beneficial to the development of these animals.

When questioned on the effectiveness of educational practices and tools, canine professionals and dog owners state that they do not consider the time taken to achieve results to be a criterion, whereas being replicable (usable by dog owners outside a formal session) and having lasting effects on the dog are. Indeed, quick results are not necessarily long-lasting. Last, the literature demonstrates that negative methods are no more effective in achieving the desired outcomes of canine education than are positive methods.

Recommendation 7: the FRCAW strongly emphasises the importance of choosing canine educational practices and tools associated with positive methods.



Table 1. Summary table of the possible impacts of canine educational practices. ST = short term, LT = mid and long term, '+' = positive method, '-' = negative method.

Practices studied	Most commonly associated method	Expert panel's view				Respondents' view	
		Factors causing pain, fear and other forms of stress		Possible consequences for dogs		Professionals	Private owners
		Methodological factors	Individual factors	Positive	Negative		
Chastising the dog through words	-	Frequent reprimands Lack of clear relationship between the context and the reprimand No account taken of the dog's emotions	Puppies Sensorially sensitive dogs (sensitivity to sound) Dogs with disabilities (deaf)		Stress (ST) Fear (ST) Anxiety (LT) Acquired resignation, apathy (LT) Pessimism (LT) Impoverishment of behavioural repertoire (LT)	Low effectiveness Negative impact on the dog's welfare	Negative impact on the dog's welfare
Forbidding interactions outside the exercises	-	Isolating the dog for a long time Isolating the dog frequently	Puppies Anxious dogs		Stress (ST) Fear (ST) Anxiety (ST)		Negative impact on the dog's welfare
Isolating the dog	-	Lack of clear relationship between the context and the isolation No account taken of the dog's emotions	Dogs with a sociable temperament		Impoverishment of behavioural repertoire (LT)	Low effectiveness Negative impact on the dog's welfare	Negative impact on the dog's welfare
Forcibly turning the dog onto its back to make it submit	-	Action carried out roughly Dog held in the position for an extended period Action carried out frequently Action not expected by the dog Lack of clear relationship between the context and the action No account taken of the dog's emotions	Puppies Old dogs Small dogs Dogs suffering from chronic pain Dogs suffering from back, neck and joint pain Dogs Sensorially sensitive dogs Dogs with emotional temperaments Aggressive dogs		Pain (ST) Stress (ST) Fear (ST) Injury (ST) Anxiety (LT) Chronic pain (LT) Acquired resignation, apathy (LT) Pessimism (LT) Phobias (LT) Distancing of dog from human (LT) Stereotypies (LT) Aggressiveness (LT) Impoverishment of behavioural repertoire (LT)	Low effectiveness Negative impact on the dog's welfare	Negative impact on the dog's welfare



Frightening the dog	-	Severe frightening stimulus High frequency of frightening stimulus Unexpected frightening stimulus Lack of clear relationship between the context and the frightening stimulus No account taken of the dog's emotions	Puppy Dogs with an emotional temperament Fearful dogs Dogs with sensorial sensitivities		Stress (ST) Fear (ST) Anxiety (LT) Acquired resignation, apathy (LT) Pessimism (LT) Impoverishment of behavioural repertoire (LT)	Negative impact on the dog's welfare	Negative impact on the dog's welfare
Giving the dog spoken encouragement	+	No account taken of the dog's emotions Failure by the human to understand the message being conveyed to the dog	Dogs with sensorial sensitivities Dogs with a disability (deaf)	Positive emotions	Exacerbation of a state of excitement (ST)		Positive impact on the dog's welfare
Giving the dog spoken praise	+						
In the warm-up period before the session leaving the human and the animal to interact freely	+	No active monitoring of the dogs during the interactions No account taken of the dog's emotions	Poor human-animal relationships Dogs that have not been socialised much or are not very sociable Dogs that are not much accustomed to human contact Fearful dogs	Positive emotions	Exacerbation of a state of excitement (ST) Stress (ST) (dogs that are not very sociable) Fear (ST) (dogs that are not very sociable)		Positive impact on the dog's welfare
Physically punishing the dog	-	Severe physical punishments Frequent physical punishments Unexpected physical punishments Lack of clear relationship between the context and the punishment No account taken of the dog's emotions	Puppy Old dog Small dogs Dogs with chronic pain Dogs with a disability (deaf, blind) Dogs with an emotional temperament Aggressive dogs		Pain (ST) Stress (ST) Fear (ST) Injury (ST) Anxiety (LT) Chronic pain (LT) Acquired resignation, apathy (LT) Pessimism (LT) Impoverishment of behavioural repertoire (LT) Increase in aggressiveness (LT)	Negative impact on the dog's welfare	Negative impact on the dog's welfare
Strongly physically punishing the dog	-						
Stroking the dog	+	Unexpected stroking Stroking too intense Stroking against the dog's will No account taken of the dog's emotions	Dogs suffering from pains located on the head (e.g. chronic otitis) or elsewhere on the body Skin sensitivities (neurological or dermatological) Dog that has had little contact with humans	Positive emotions	Stress (ST) Fear (ST) (anxious dogs)		Positive impact on the dog's welfare

Table 2. Summary table of the possible impacts of tools used for canine education. ST = short term, LT = mid and long term, '+' = positive method, '-' = negative method.

Tools studied	Most commonly associated method	Expert panel's view				Respondents' view	
		Factors causing pain, fear and other forms of stress		Possible consequences for dogs		Professionals	Private owners
		Methodological factors	Individual factors	Positive	Negative		
Anti-escape collar	-	Unpredictability of activation Poor reliability of trigger mechanism Frequent activation of stimulus Intense stimulus	Sensorially sensitive dogs Dogs suffering from pain Short hair, absence of hair		Injury (ST) Burns (ST) Pain (ST), chronic pain (LT) Risk of escape (ST) Frustration (ST) Anxiety (LT) Pessimism (LT) Acquired resignation, apathy (LT) Repetitive behaviours (LT) Dermatological complaints around the neck area (LT) Neurological complaints (epileptic dogs) Aggressiveness (LT)	Negative impact on the dog's welfare	Negative impact on the dog's welfare
Anti-pull harness or Halti harness	-	Poor harness design Frequent use	Shoulder problems		Difficulties or even pain in joints (ST)	Low effectiveness Negative impact on the dog's welfare	Neutral effect on the dog's welfare
Anti-pull head collar (halti)	-	Poor design of head collar Frequent use	Neck problems		Pain if predisposed to neck complaints (ST) Chronic pain (LT)	Negative impact on the dog's welfare	Neutral effect on the dog's welfare
Catapult	-	Unpredictability of use Use on the dog (and not nearby)	Sensorially sensitive dogs Emotional/fearful/anxious dogs		Stress (ST) Fear (ST) Phobias (LT) Distancing of dog from human (LT)	Negative impact on the dog's welfare	Negative impact on the dog's welfare
Choke chain	-	Frequent use Extreme use	Pain around the neck area Tracheal flaccidity Skin lesions, dermatoses Short hair, absence of hair Low muscle mass		Injury (ST) Pain (ST), chronic pain (LT) Dermatological complaints around the neck area (LT) Distancing of dog from human (LT)	Negative impact on the dog's welfare	Negative impact on the dog's welfare
Citronella impregnated collar or compressed air collar	-	Unpredictability of activation	Sensorially sensitive dogs Asthmatic dogs		Stress (ST) Fear (ST) Phobias (LT) Distancing of dog from human (LT)	Negative impact on the dog's welfare	Negative impact on the dog's welfare



Clicker	+	Use not synchronised with behaviour to be reinforced	Sensorially sensitive dogs			Complicated to arrange	Positive impact on the dog's welfare
Compressed air spray can	-	Frequent use Unpredictability of use	Sensorially sensitive dogs Emotional/fearful/anxious dogs		Stress (ST) Fear (ST) Phobias (LT) Distancing of dog from human (LT)	Negative impact on the dog's welfare	Negative impact on the dog's welfare
Demonstrator dog	+		Dogs that have not been socialised much or are not very sociable Fearful dogs Aggressive dogs	Positive social interaction			
Dog used to control others	-	Frequent use	Dogs that have not been socialised much or are not very sociable Fearful dogs Aggressive dogs		Stress (ST) Fear (ST) Phobias (LT)	Complicated to arrange	Positive impact on the dog's welfare
Electric or electrostatic collar	-	Unpredictability of activation Poor reliability of activation mechanism for ant-bark collars Frequent activation Intense stimulus	Sensorially sensitive dogs Dogs suffering from pain Short hair, absence of hair		Injury (ST) Burns (ST) Frustration (ST) Pain (ST), Chronic pain (LT) Increase in shock intensity (ST) Anxiety (LT) Dermatological complaints around the neck area (LT) Neurological complaints (epileptic dogs) (LT) Aggressiveness (LT) Pessimism (LT) Acquired resignation, apathy (LT) Distancing of dog from human (LT)	Negative impact on the dog's welfare	Negative impact on the dog's welfare
Food treats	+		Diabetic dogs Obese dogs Dogs with food allergies	Positive emotions			Positive impact on the dog's welfare
Laser	+		Predisposition to compulsive behaviours (hunting temperament) Epileptic dogs	Positive emotions		Negative impact on the dog's welfare	Negative impact on the dog's welfare
Long lead		Inappropriate tool at the end of the lead (i.e. strangle/choke collar)					Positive impact on the dog's welfare
Muzzle allowing the animal to		Inappropriate materials used for the muzzle	Skin lesions, dermatoses around the head and muzzle		Difficulties (ST)		



drink, eat and bark		Muzzle worn for long periods	Pedigree dog not accustomed to wearing a muzzle				
Muzzle preventing the animal from drinking, eating and barking	-	Inappropriate materials used for the muzzle Muzzle worn for long periods Frequent use High temperatures	Skin lesions, dermatoses around the head and muzzle Renal problems or other infections requiring regular drinking Pedigree dog not accustomed to wearing a muzzle		Difficulties (ST) Impossibility of satisfying the dog's needs (ST) Frustration (ST) Pessimism (LT) Acquired resignation, apathy (LT)		
Prong/pinch collar Torquatus collar	-	Frequent use	Pain around the neck area Tracheal flaccidity Skin lesions, dermatoses Short hair, absence of hair Low muscle mass		Injury (ST) Pain (ST), chronic pain (LT) Increase in intercranial pressure/exophthalmia (ST) Dermatological complaints around the neck area (LT) Distancing of dog from human (LT)	Negative impact on the dog's welfare	Negative impact on the dog's welfare
Shaker tin containing pebbles or nails	-	Frequent use Unpredictability of use Use on the dog (and not nearby)	Sensorially sensitive dogs Emotional/fearful/anxious dogs		Stress (ST) Fear (ST) Phobias (LT) Distancing of dog from human (LT)	Negative impact on the dog's welfare	Negative impact on the dog's welfare
Simple harness		Poor harness design				Low effectiveness	Neutral effect on the dog's welfare
Strangle collar	-	Frequent use Extreme pressure	Pain around the neck area Tracheal flaccidity Skin lesions, dermatoses Short hair, absence of hair Low muscle mass		Injury (ST) Pain (ST), Chronic pain (LT) Dermatological complaints around the neck area (LT) Distancing of dog from human (LT)	Negative impact on the dog's welfare	Negative impact on the dog's welfare
Target stick	+						Negative impact on the dog's welfare
Toy	+	Sole toy	Predisposition to compulsive behaviours	Positive emotions			Positive impact on the dog's welfare
Ultrasonic collar	-	Unpredictability of activation Frequent activation	Sensorially sensitive dogs		Hearing difficulties (ST) Frustration (ST) Pessimism (LT)	Negative impact on the dog's welfare	Negative impact on the dog's welfare
Vibrating collar	-	Unpredictability of activation Frequent activation Intense vibration	Sensorially sensitive dogs		Sensory difficulties (ST) Frustration (ST) Pessimism (LT)	Negative impact on the dog's welfare	Negative impact on the dog's welfare
Whistle			Sensorially sensitive dog		Hearing difficulties (ST)		Negative impact on the dog's welfare

