

ABTC Standard - Animal Behaviour Technician

Overview

This ABTC Standard relates to the design and implementation of programmes to provide preventative and first-aid behavioural advice to owners/handlers and/or co-professionals, based on best practice and scientific evidence. This Standard also includes the implementation of behaviour modification and/or environmental modification plans, developed by a CAB or VB following assessment/evaluation of an animal by that same CAB or VB. This Standard includes the skills and competences required to effectively communicate any advice required to owners/handlers and/or co-professionals to improve animal welfare.

This Standard is suitable for those working in the animal care sector, with responsibility for managing humane approaches to the behaviour of animals. It is suitable for:

- Veterinary Nurses (working with any species)
- Practitioners working in a rescue setting (working with any species)
- Practitioners working in private practice (working with any species)

All of whom may do the following:

- Design and/or implement procedures to safeguard against the development of problem behaviours
- Provide preventative advice to owners/handlers, and co-professionals
- Provide behavioural first-aid advice to owners/handlers prior to referral to a suitably qualified practitioner
- Implement a behaviour modification plan developed by a Clinical Animal Behaviourist (CAB) or Veterinary Behaviourist (VB), following an assessment/evaluation by that same CAB or VB. This could be alongside the CAB/VB or independently – as agreed by both parties

The Veterinary Surgeons Act (1966) limits the activities which may be carried out by those who are not registered veterinary surgeons. All activities should be carried out within the constraints of the Veterinary Surgeons Act.

In accordance with the ABTC Code of Professional Conduct, all individual practitioners are required to work within this ABTC Standard and their professional competence. All cases that are or develop beyond the scope of this ABTC Standard should be referred on responsibly (see Code of Conduct section 1.2).

All practitioners should be familiar with the Standard for their role and that of all other ABTC roles so that they understand the differences between the roles and refer accordingly.

Performance Criteria

You must be able to:

1. Evaluate the needs of a range of animal species and how these may be provided for whilst under your duty of care.
2. Identify the appropriate animal health and welfare legislation, associated codes of practice and other legislation relevant to the animals being worked with and take any action necessary to ensure these are followed.
3. Undertake risk assessments in line with current health and safety legislation.
4. Identify and act in ways that best ensures the well-being of the animal, protecting and promoting welfare both within the short and long term.
5. Gather evidence about the behaviour of the animal from all sources identified as likely to provide relevant information. This could include direct observation, reviewing the case history/notes, discussion with owner/handler and other relevant professionals. Evaluate the quality of this evidence and act appropriately to remedy any areas of concern or deficiency in it.
6. For the prevention of problematic behaviour and/or first aid behavioural advice, evaluate the effect of physical factors on the animal's behaviour including species, breed, parentage, sex, age, medical conditions, physiological status, developmental history and identify those most relevant to the areas of concern identified.
7. For the prevention of problematic behaviour and/or first aid behavioural advice, evaluate the impact of external factors on the behaviour of the animal and areas of concern identified, to include: immediate surroundings, wider environment, environmental pressures, ethological requirements and previous experiences.
8. For the prevention of problematic behaviour and/or first aid behavioural advice, evaluate the impact of husbandry/management practices on the behaviour of the animal and areas of concern identified, including: presence/absence of environmental enrichment, social contact, physical activity, interactions and relationship with owner/handler and other humans, diet.
9. Evaluate issues concerning the safety, efficacy and reliability of complementary and alternative or non-prescription or prescribed therapies or products.
10. Demonstrate skill and competency in the selection and use of a wide range of preventative and first aid behaviour techniques and training aids. Be able to teach owners/handlers how to apply these techniques and training aids to ensure their effective use, protect against their misuse, and ensure owners/handlers protect the welfare of the animal.
11. Apply the principles of animal learning theory to humane training methods to achieve agreed goals.

12. Demonstrate the ability to train an animal to do the exercises appropriate to the animal species, context and desired behaviour, in a number of different ways, taking into account the animal's species, breed, type and physical capabilities.
13. Justify why a particular preventative or first aid behavioural programme/approach has been selected instead of any other possible regimes.
14. Devise and implement a structured programme for the prevention of problematic behaviour and/or first aid behavioural advice that identifies and sets realistic goals and time scales for monitoring of its progress and assessment of its success. Implement a structured behaviour modification plan devised by a Clinical Animal Behaviourist or Veterinary Behaviourist, identifying and setting realistic goals and time scales for monitoring of its progress and assessment of its success.
15. Discuss and agree a programme for the prevention of problematic behaviour, and/or first aid behavioural advice with the owner/handler and others involved with the animal. Rectify areas of misunderstanding, confusion or concern where appropriate, and obtain their informed consent.
16. Ensure the owner/handler understands their role in the delivery of an effective programme and the importance of maintaining the desired change to behaviour once it is achieved.
17. Identify and liaise with other professionals and organisations involved in the care of the animal to ensure a consistent and appropriate approach that both promotes animal welfare and is legally compliant.
18. Identify any professional, ethical or other issues that have arisen when working with the animal, owner/handler or other individual and take appropriate action to address these.
19. Explain to the owner/handler of the animal, through written guidelines or other appropriate system of feedback the areas of concern regarding their animal that have been identified, their possible causes and the rationale behind the approach selected to remedy these and any other associated issues that have been identified.
20. Evaluate the effectiveness of the programme through appropriate follow-ups which may include direct observation of the animal and/or liaison with the owner/handler and others involved with the animal. As appropriate, revise the programme in response to this feedback to ensure its effectiveness and success. Where the programme was devised by a Clinical Animal Behaviourist or Veterinary Behaviourist this must be done in discussion with them.
21. Maintain required records on each animal so that it is possible to critically reflect on the appropriateness and success of different approaches; identify any improvements to practice that could be made.
22. Maintain a high level of professional conduct including an awareness of own limitations and refer cases on when appropriate.
23. Identify gaps in own knowledge and understanding; and plan, record and evaluate a personal Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme to address these.

Knowledge and understanding - This Standard is at Level 5

You need to know and understand:

Animal Behaviour

1. The ethology of vertebrate animals, including perceptual abilities, maintenance and social behaviours and communication, their function and their motivational basis in the most commonly kept domestic species.
2. How to recognise, evaluate and report on the behavioural states of the most commonly kept domestic animals and those that most commonly contribute to the caseload of a Clinical Animal Behaviourist, to include signals indicative of ill health as well as key behavioural states such as fear, nervousness, aggression, frustration, threat-reduction, play and relaxation.
3. Behavioural ontogeny; to include sensitive periods, socialisation and attachment theory.
4. The interaction between biological and evolutionary influences and the environment in which an animal is kept, and their roles in the development of behavioural disorders for a range of the most commonly kept domestic animals.

Animal Health and Welfare

5. The key ethological, psychological and physiological concepts that underpin animal welfare.
6. The physiological and behavioural indicators of welfare in vertebrate animals.
7. Welfare considerations in the management and training of animals.

Animal Learning and Training

8. The theory of animal learning to include habituation; sensitisation, classical conditioning, operant conditioning, insight and social learning, animal cognition and the concept of consciousness.
9. The theory underlying learned problem behaviour and training techniques.
10. The principles and rationale behind the use of the range of training, preventative and behavioural modification techniques, to include systematic desensitisation, counter-conditioning and the use of clickers or other markers/conditioned reinforcers.
11. The techniques most appropriate for the prevention and/or modification of problematic behaviour, the rationale for their use/application, and the strengths and weaknesses of each.

12. The theory underpinning strategies and techniques for the implementation of preventative behavioural interventions, in both young and adult animals.

The Interaction between Health and Behaviour

13. The functional anatomy and physiology of the vertebrate nervous and endocrine systems and their role in mediating behaviour.
14. The signs of ill-health and common conditions influencing behaviour and associated veterinary terminology.
15. The behavioural consequences of medical disorders.
16. Psychopharmacology and the mode of action of the major classes of drugs used in clinical animal behaviour.
17. Commonly used complementary and alternative or non-prescription or prescribed therapies or products and their claimed/potential benefits.

Clinical Procedures

18. The general understanding of the range of common behavioural disorders in animals.
19. The appropriate application of the principles of ethology and learning theory to the prevention and/or modification of problematic behaviour.
20. The delivery of appropriately structured programmes for the prevention and/or modification of problematic behaviour that are likely to be effective for target behaviours identified.
21. The range of effective communication skills, both in the collection of relevant information and provision of advice in face to face or remote communication via telephone, email, letters and reports with clients and relevant professionals, and how to assess and resolve issues relating to client understanding.
22. Relevant techniques and approaches for the recording of progress of an animal through a training plan and the reporting of progress to owners/handlers and relevant professionals.
23. The interactions appropriate in professional relationships and how to apply these in practice.
24. The common professional, ethical or other issues that need to be considered in animal care settings and the action that is appropriate to address these, including an appreciation of the value of referral.
25. How to identify situations where further action may be necessary, including ways in which compliance with an extended programme for the prevention and/or modification of problematic behaviour may be encouraged.

26. UK and other relevant legislation that relates to the ownership and use of animals and the role and duties of the Animal Behaviour Technician, Clinical Animal Behaviourist, Veterinary Surgeon, paraprofessionals, owners/handlers and others within it; to include the legal implications and duties associated with the provision of advice and professional liability and client confidentiality.
27. Employment law, health and safety legislation and the UK-GDPR (United Kingdom General Data Protection Regulation); and their implication for the Animal Behaviour Technician, their clients and others.