

Information for Practitioners regarding UKAS accreditation

The ABTC has previously been in lengthy discussion with the RCVS regarding possible regulation of all practitioners, but changes to the RCVS' overall plan, announced earlier this year, mean this is unlikely to make any progress for at least 5 years because a change in legislation is necessary if the entire training and behaviour sector is included. Other routes of regulation and accreditation have therefore been considered.

The United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) is the National Accreditation Body for the United Kingdom. They are an independent body, appointed by government, to assess and accredit organisations that provide services including certification, testing, inspection and calibration. The aim of gaining UKAS accreditation is to assure what ABTC does to validate the competence of those on the Register. The standard the ABTC will be pursuing is BS/EN 17024 – the competence of people doing things (parallel groups including gas fitters, MOT garages, etc). Essentially UKAS will be ensuring that ABTC assesses and upholds standards in the way it says it does. The existing ABTC role standards will remain unchanged.

UKAS will need the ABTC to prove they have a robust and consistent assessment process in place to ensure all practitioners are competent at the standard they claim. Government accepts that UKAS accreditation proves the competence of the person or organisation.

The Government and devolved administrations (Scotland and Wales) have shown interest in regulation of dog trainers and behaviourists given the recent increase in serious and fatal dog bite incidents. There has also been specific reference to UKAS accreditation as being their preferred route.

Possible Changes:

- Modification to the assessment process for some Practitioner Organisations (PO), to ensure all POs are assessing in a uniform and repeatable way.
- Reassessment at intervals throughout your career to ensure competency is maintained.

We do not currently have further information about the particulars of these potential changes but we consider any change unlikely to be excessive.

Benefit for Practitioners:

It is extremely unlikely that anyone who isn't accredited through a UKAS approved route would be prevented from working in animal training and behaviour. But the government is likely to endorse and advise the public that they should be using those who are both in other legislation (such as licensing law) and as public information. In addition it is probable that vets and insurance companies will perceive UKAS accreditation as being the only means of ensuring competence and will then only refer to and accept ABTC Registered practitioners.

Finances:

The initial full inspection costs £15,000 - £17,000, and an annual fee of £7,000 and we will need to be reassessed every fifth year which will cost the same as the initial validation. There will be an ongoing administrative load.

The initial costs - up to approximately £20,000 - will be sought from fundraising and grants. The initial stages of identifying suitable grants have already begun.

Once accredited, the ongoing funding will need to be self-sustaining. We intend to do this partly by increasing practitioners' registration fees. This fee would reflect the potential income for each role, so CABs (Clinical Animal Behaviourists) would pay more than ATs (Animal Trainers), for example. Exact figures are not yet available. Other long-term income streams are also being investigated to reduce the cost to individual Practitioners.

Council Vote:

On 27th October the Council voted in support of the ABTC going ahead with a preliminary assessment by UKAS. This is likely to happen in Spring 2023 and the organisation can already cover the cost of this. There is no obligation to continue the process past this stage. Following this assessment UKAS will provide guidance on what the ABTC would need to do, change, adjust etc to be ready to apply for full assessment.

At this point the long-term implications of UKAS Accreditation including the cost, any necessary changes to procedures and administrative load will be entirely clear. Then Council will again be consulted, and a final vote will be made to decide if the ABTC does indeed proceed with assessment for UKAS accreditation.