

Final grant report form: Student Grants

Project title:	Imported rescue dogs; reasons, methods and welfare.
Researcher:	Charlotte Norman
Year awarded:	2017

Provide a lay summary outlining the project, focusing on the project's achievements and potential impact to animal welfare.

An online questionnaire was advertised on social media and received 3080 responses, from people, living in the UK, who had adopted a rescue dog from abroad in the last 5 years. Descriptive analysis was conducted on the data from these respondents, including counts, tally and chi-squared tests to determine if there was any significant relationship between variables.

An aim of this project was to discover the reasons why people adopt dogs from abroad, participants' primarily chose to adopt from abroad based on want for a particular dog they had seen advertised and concern for its situation, however some had been refused dogs from UK rescues.

A further aim was to identify whether any welfare problems were associated with this practice. In terms of the health of the dogs imported, Many arrived with known health conditions (20%, no=603). Furthermore, zoonotic parasites *Leishmania infantum*, *Dirofilaria immitus* and *Linguata serrata* had an apparent prevalence of 14.8% (79/533) 3% (12/396) and 2% (5/252) respectively. Close monitoring is required of the health of imported rescue dog's and vets should be aware of the infectious diseases carried by imported dogs.

Most respondents who have rehomed their dog or considered it since adoption, did so because of behavioural problems (70%, n=218), however behaviour of the imported rescue dogs appears comparable to that of other rescue dogs. The majority of participants are happy with their dog's behaviour, but those who did experience problems have had significant trouble.

The project also looked into how participants went about adopting their rescue dog from abroad. Dogs came from 44 countries, primarily Romania (34%, n=1035) and most were found on the street (61%, n=1865). Predominantly adoption occurred through an organisation (92%, n=2773) and participants found the process extremely easy and felt they had sufficient support and advice.

The EU Pet Travel Scheme was used to import 89% and only 1.2% of dogs were imported correctly under the Balai Directive (no=37). The project has highlighted a misuse of the EU pet travel scheme, clear guidelines regarding the importation of rescue dogs should be sent to rescue organisations. Advice should also be available on the GOV.UK website and on social media.

UK rescue organisations could learn from success of organisations rehoming overseas dogs: Use social media to tell the dogs' stories. Participants valued a sense of community when adopting from abroad, for example through Facebook pages. They also felt very supported by the organisations and many dogs were found via word of mouth.

This study has yielded valuable information regarding the importation of rescue dogs and has highlighted areas of concern relating to importation under the incorrect law and the importation of exotic infectious diseases, posing health risks to both imported and existing UK dogs.

Provide a short description of your personal experience in undertaking this project

I learnt a lot about research by doing this summer project. Prior to this, I had done little to no research so both terminology and research processes were new for me.

I spent 4 weeks preparing the questionnaire and doing research in the form of a literature review on Imported rescue dogs. The questionnaire included primarily closed questions, some with open 'other' answers and 2 open questions. Being able to generate this questionnaire myself, gave me the opportunity to improve my writing skills and it also made me think about how the questions were worded to ensure they were clear and not leading.

The questionnaire was a huge success, receiving three times the amount of responses we estimated. This was exciting but increased my work load hugely. Cleaning of this data took me over 3 weeks which meant data analysis continued into term time. Overall the project took me over 12 weeks work instead of the expected 8 weeks.

We also had a great response from the Industry. The APHA contacted me during the advertising phase and was so interested in the results they have invited me to present to interested parliamentary members on 1st December. Similarly, we were contacted by the SSPCA who put on a canine conference on the impact of dog trade on canine welfare. I was amongst the speakers to an audience of industry professionals, including all the SPCA's, BVA, RCVS, DEFRA, APHA, Scottish Parliamentary officials, BSAVA, Dogs Trust, Battersea and many other interested parties. I gave a 30 minute presentation in Edinburgh on 9th November 2017 and had a really positive response from the audience. This really built my confidence in public speaking and networking.

Use the space below for any other relevant information you wish to report on. This could include details of knowledge transfer activities and any future plans/actions.

Knowledge transfer activities

- SSPCA 'The impact of dog trade on canine welfare' Edinburgh. 9th November 2017
- APHA presentation to interested parliament members. 1st December 2017
- Poster presentation at the Veterinary student's research conference in Bristol. 11th November 2017

Future Plans

- Finish writing up
- Publish research in Veterinary Record, Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science, Animal Welfare.



