

Final grant report form: Student Grants

Project title:	Investigating the usage of enrichment feeding for pet dogs and the associated perceived benefits and challenges.
Researcher:	Madeline Heys
Supervisor:	Carri Westgarth and Imogen Lloyd
Year awarded:	2021

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

My research project investigated the use of enrichment feeding (EF) with pet dogs – that is, the use of toys, puzzles, or games to provide food in place of a bowl. EF is recommended by vets and behaviourists alike, yet there is a significant lack of research to support these recommendations. The research project took the form of an online survey distributed to dog owners across social media, receiving 1750 eligible responses. The data was then cleaned, and statistics were run using statistical software package SPSS. The study investigated the reasons owners use EF, as well as the perceived benefits and barriers to its use. We identified the ways in which owners used EF and found that owners believe it provides mental stimulation and prevents boredom, whilst time and cost were the most frequently cited barriers to its use. Owners were less likely to use enrichment if they were male, or over 50 years old. Dogs were less likely to be fed using enrichment if they were older, of working type compared to hound, and have smaller exercise needs. Dogs that were fed using enrichment were more likely to experience fear of other dogs, training difficulties, or show interest in their meals. Using enrichment feeding was associated with owner perceptions of reduced hunger and begging. These results reveal potential benefits of EF to contribute to obesity treatment and the management of behavioural problems. Further research using experimental research designs into EF and weight, behaviour and quality of life would be beneficial to establish causal relationships and to provide a basis upon which advice could be given by veterinary and behavioural professionals.

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

Undertaking this research project was a busy and challenging eight weeks.

I was lucky to have worked closely with two supportive supervisors and gained from their knowledge and experience throughout the research duration. I put into practice the research skills I have been taught at university in designing and running a survey, cleaning data, using statistical software, analysing results, and creating a paper. I feel much more confident now looking ahead to research projects I will be undertaking this year, and have my brain filled with ideas on how I or others could follow up on the research in the future. It was a great experience that would not have been possible without a grant from the AWF that allowed me to complete the project.

Please provide details of any reports, papers or other publications that have been or will be published to communicate your findings.

Paper is being drafted for submission for publication in a peer-reviewed journal.

If you have created any posters or presentations on the project for your University work, please enclose these.

N/A