

Association for the Study of Animal Behaviour: Accreditation Committee

Workshop on the provision of supervised experience for the trainee clinical animal behaviourist

1st July 2004, British Veterinary Association, London

Background:

The workshop reported on in these proceedings, was held at the British Veterinary Association, London on 1st July 2004. It was organized by the Association for the Study of Animal Behaviour accreditation committee. A total of 24 invited delegates attended, representing academic institutions, trade bodies and practitioners and others involved or interested in the provision of supervised experience to those wishing to become clinical animal behaviourists.

The ASAB accreditation committee was set up in 2002 by the Association for the Study of Animal Behaviour and charged with establishing and administering a scheme for the certification of clinical animal behaviourists in the UK. Certification is dependent upon the applicant meeting prescribed standards of academic knowledge and practical experience in the treatment of behavioural disorders in animals. A working party report on the need for the certification of clinical animal behaviourists can be found on the ASAB website (www.asab.org.uk). The existing standards for academic knowledge and practical experience are detailed in Appendix I; current standards can be found by visiting the ASAB website.

Aim:

The aim of the workshop was to consider the situation presently existing in the UK with respect to the provision of supervised experience, to share information on current practice and opportunities in the provision of supervised experience, and to make recommendations that will enable individuals wishing to pursue a career in the treatment of behavioural disorders in animals to more easily obtain the range and quality of supervised experience they need to operate as competent professionals.

The meeting opened with a presentation on the background to the ASAB certification scheme, a detailing of its standards, and an outline of the problems currently existing in the provision of supervised experience, as they appeared to the accreditation committee. Two parallel breakout groups, comprising delegates from the academic institutions and those representing trade bodies and practitioners, were then asked to consider the following questions:

- 1) What problems are faced by individuals/practitioners/academic institutions looking to undertake or provide supervised experience?
- 2) How can these identified problems be addressed?

The thoughts of the individual break-out groups were fed back to the consolidated group. A discussion of the key issues raised then took place.

Finding solutions to the problem of supervised experience

Stephen Wickens, Secretary, ASAB accreditation committee, UFAW, The Old School, Brewhouse Hill, Wheathampstead, Herts AL4 8AN.

At present, within the UK, any individual wishing to gain the practical experience and expertise necessary to deal effectively with behavioural disorders in animals faces a problem. Whilst courses exist which aim to provide some, or all, of the background academic knowledge expected of anyone presenting themselves as a professional and effective clinical animal behaviourist, the same is not true for the practical, client based, skills. Opportunities to gain structured practical supervision in these problem-solving skills are very limited. Feedback indicates that, for most, the supervision offered is only at the level of observing clinics and asking limited questions of clients.

As outlined in its accreditation scheme, the ASAB accreditation committee has a specific interest in addressing this shortfall, as certification under this scheme is dependent, in part, on an applicant demonstrating they have undergone a process of supervised experience. Irrespective of this, it is important for the whole developing field of clinical animal behaviour that a more structured framework of supervision is put in place; that allows individuals across the country to gain access to the training in the practical problem-solving skills they need. If this does not occur, then individuals will continue to learn on the job, and make mistakes that may be detrimental to their clients and the welfare of their animal 'patients'. It is the hope of the accreditation committee that this workshop will help start the process.

What are the problems currently faced in the provision of supervised experience?

Each of the parties that may be involved in the delivery of supervised experience - the trainee, supervising practitioner and academic institution - have different concerns regarding the process.

Trainee

For trainees, the chief concerns relate to the lack of structure and opportunities to gain one-to-one supervision. Within the UK, there is presently no centralized database listing individuals who are willing, and able, to supervise. Trainees therefore have to accept the opportunities that are presented to them, and this can cause them to be concerned about the present, and future, value of the supervised experience they are being offered. When they are able to gain supervision, they have additional concerns relating to the type of supervision given. Most of the supervision offered consists of trainees sitting in on consultations, with limited opportunities to ask questions of the client. Only in exceptional cases will trainees be given the opportunity to conduct a consultation from start to finish. Unless the clinic has been carefully structured for their benefit, most trainees have difficulty in gaining experience of a good cross section of disorders. Finally, there is variation in the cost of gaining supervised experience; some practitioners charge for supervision, whilst others don't.

Supervising practitioner

Whilst the provision of adequate supervision is important for the long term future of clinical animal behaviour in the UK, in the short term it is not high on the agenda for many practitioners. Their major concern is the economic viability of their businesses. For them, providing supervision is a peripheral activity, to be undertaken if circumstances permit. Indeed, there are practitioners who view the provision of supervision as little more than the training of future competitors.

Providing supervision to trainees is costly, both in terms of time and money. Providing detailed feedback and guidance to trainees is a time consuming activity, especially so for those supervisors who are willing to let trainees run consultations, and yet if the supervised experience is to have any value such feedback must be given. Time may also be spent in structuring clinics to provide trainees with a cross section of cases. In addition, because of the time-factor, supervision also has financial costs. Fewer clients can be seen when supervision is being undertaken, and this financial loss has to be absorbed. This loss is offset by some practitioners through charging for supervision. There are additional costs implications of providing supervision, such as the need for suitable insurance. Another concern to supervising practitioners relates to the possible impact the trainee may have on their relationship with clients. Clients pay to have the behavioural disorder of their animal resolved; they therefore want to have their case dealt with by an experienced practitioner. Some clients may object to a trainee sitting in, or taking a case, others may object to paying the same fee for cases seen by trainees as those by the practitioner, even though the cost to the supervisor may be more. Personal reputation is also important to practitioners, as it is built up slowly through success and word of mouth. Understandably many practitioners have concerns about the impact trainees may have on this, and may be reluctant to supervise for this reason. Finally, there is a lack of support for most supervisors; they tend to operate in isolation, and have received little or no formal training on supervision. Not unexpectedly, the standard of supervision provided by practitioners is thought to be variable.

Academic institutions

For academic institutions, their concerns relate to their ability to meet the demands and expectations of existing and future students. Many students are attracted to courses in animal science and behaviour because they have an interest in working in the field of animal behaviour disorders. They may expect to be able to pursue academic courses that will give them not only the background academic knowledge they need, but also sufficient practical experience to be able to operate as competent clinical animal behaviourists. At present, beyond the occasional sitting in on clinics, this is not generally happening. The other problem that faces academic institutions is the identification and employment of clinical animal behaviourists who have both the necessary knowledge and skills to provide supervision and are available at the times they are needed. Some institutions have solved this by recruiting practitioners full-time, to both lecture and to run clinics to which the students can contribute. For most, this option is restrictively expensive.

Is there a solution to the problem of supervised experience?

Whilst it is not the function of the ASAB accreditation committee to prescribe how this shortfall in the provision of supervised experience is addressed, we do feel that the academic institutions might play a greater role in the provision of supervised experience, through partnerships with recognized and suitably qualified clinical animal behaviourists, such as those certified under the ASAB accreditation scheme.

Such a partnership could draw on the respective skills and strengths of each:

- Academic institutions have extensive experience in the setting up of new courses, in the recruitment and support of students and in the setting up of formal assessment programmes. They have the quality-assurance procedures needed to ensure standards and can offer national recognized qualifications.
- Clinical animal behaviourists, certified under the ASAB accreditation scheme, possess the necessary knowledge and skills to provide supervised experience, and have had these independently validated. They have also signed up to a Code of Conduct. They already have a reputation and client base.

A partnership would allow practitioners the opportunity to offer clinics to clients in an academic environment, where an element of training and instruction would be expected and accepted. The academic institution can also offer support with the administrative elements of supervision, and a range of facilities. Academic institutions gain by being able to offer new courses that build on existing ones, allowing progression for existing students, and attracting new students and new avenues of income.

Breakout session:

- 1. practitioners and trade bodies**
- 2. academic institutions**

Issues to be discussed:

- What problems are faced by individuals/practitioners/academic institutions looking to undertake or provide supervised experience?
- How can these identified problems be addressed?

Breakout group – practitioners and trade bodies

Rapporteur: Stephen Wickens

Issues raised:

Need for change: There was a general recognition of the problems identified as applying to practitioners and agreement that there is a need to improve the structure for providing supervision to those wishing to become clinical animal behaviourists, particularly at the level of taking case histories and providing advice. Most practitioners reported they had supervised few, if any, to this stage. Of those who have, most have done so within the framework provided by an academic institution.

Partnership: There was broad support for a move towards a greater centralization of training in academic institutions. Practitioners welcomed, in principle, the support and platform these would provide. A number of practitioners felt that it would make it easier for them to offer supervision, as it would overcome the identified problems associated with client expectations of what they should get out of a consultation.

Assessment: The practitioners viewed supervised experience as an incremental learning process, with trainees moving from pure observation to the taking of a more active role in the consultation, dependent upon an on-going assessment of capabilities. This knowledge, assessment and recognition of each trainee's abilities was thought to be a vital part of the supervising process; progression certainly should not be a given, rather individuals have to adequately demonstrate that they should progress. It was felt that the supervisor agreeing to a trainee's move from one level to another should supervise that individual's first case at the next level, as they are best placed to judge how the trainee copes. There was a general feeling that it would be wise for anyone seeking to take on a trainee from someone else to undertake a brief review of that individual's skills themselves before allowing them to take charge of any consultation.

Learning experience: The nature of the supervised experience was discussed. At the early stages of gaining experience, the practitioners felt that it was acceptable for large groups to observe consultations. Some institutions use videos of consultations to aid group discussions of cases, others allow groups of students to watch 'live' consultations via cctv links, and discuss the consultation with the group afterwards. At the advanced levels, which feature more active trainee participation, there was a general feeling that it was impossible to effectively supervise more than three people at one time. There was agreement that during any supervision it was essential for the supervisor to be present to provide support and feedback. Simply showing a large group a video was not sufficient in itself, an element of feedback and a questioning/assessment of learning is an integral element of the supervision process.

The learning experience available to a trainee was perceived as differing depending on whether it occurs in a clinic setting or a home environment. At present, the majority of academic institutions involved in delivering training do so in a clinic environment; conversely practitioners commonly interview clients in their home

environment. The clinic environment was felt to be more conducive to larger group observations, whereas one on one supervision in the home environment was felt to offer the trainee a better, more intensive, learning experience.

Payment for training. There was a recognition that supervised training is not a cheap process, and it is unrealistic to continue to provide it to trainees for free. It was accepted that trainees should expect to have to pay to receive the training they need. This will cause problems to trainees, and many are likely to need to seek external funding to support their training, especially at level 3. It was hoped that centering training in academic institution would make any search for funding easier, as charities/funding bodies are more likely to support training in such institutions than to give funds directly to individuals. This need to charge students fees is likely to reduce the number who can progress to level 3.

Training of supervisors: Most practitioners looking to supervise indicated that they felt they would benefit from training in supervision and assessment, to ensure quality and consistency. Many academic institutions already provide training in these skills to their staff, as part of their induction procedures. The ASAB accreditation committee sees clear benefit in ASAB certified clinical animal behaviourists (CCAB) attending such courses. It also identified an opportunity for ASAB, or the trade bodies, to organize a training day(s) to ensure that existing CCAB's, and others interesting in supervising, are operating at a consistent standard.

Charging structure for clinics: A question was raised as to whether there should be any differentiation in the fees asked for clinics, depending on whether they were involved in providing supervision or not. It was felt that clients may be more accepting of training clinics if they were cheaper. Two problems were raised by this notion; reduced fees may give an impression of a reduced standard of service and cheaper, subsidised, training clinics would compete for business with existing practitioners in an area, who may themselves be contributing their skills to the subsidised clinics. In addition, there may be little financial logic in offering cheaper training clinics, as they are commonly more expensive to run than standard clinics. Specialist clinics in veterinary institutions face a similar problem, and do not differentiate. They are there to provide the best possible standards of care, irrespective of their role in training, and therefore charge the going rate. They overcome any reluctance in clients to pay full rates by highlighting their position as centres of excellence, in which consultations are likely to be longer than usual and the level of feedback, because of the teaching element, greater.

Species specialism: For anyone to claim a specialty in any species, it was agreed that it is advisable for that individual to have undergone some supervision at level 3 on the species, ie they must have taken full case histories and provided advice under supervision.

Breakout group - academic institutions

Rapporteur: John Bradshaw

Issues raised:

Demand: The academic institutions recognised that, potentially, there are a large number of existing students and other individuals who would sign up to courses providing supervision in the field of behavioural disorders.

Selection: There was concern as to who would select students for supervised experience, and what criteria would be used, given that demand for places on these courses would most likely outstrip supply?

Assessment of learning: To allow unambiguous and fair selection of students, and assessment of their progression, it was agreed that more defined learning outcomes are needed for each of the three supervised experience levels outlined in the ASAB accreditation standards. These would allow institutions to better judge how, or whether, they can participate in providing supervised experience. Different institutions indicated that they already have schemes, which they use to assess performance eg during work placements, that may provide suitable models for adaptation.

Fees: Academic institutions would need to charge students, to recoup costs associated with running courses providing supervised experience. It was pointed out that these costs may be greater for academic institutions than for individual practitioners providing supervision, because of the institution's higher overheads.

Provision of supervisors: At present, there are only a handful of clinical animal behaviourists certified under the ASAB accreditation scheme. Given this, the question was raised as to whether it is practicable for ASAB to require that each student must be supervised by three CCABs? It was clarified that (a) others could supervise, in particular recognised veterinary specialists, and (b) the scheme was in its early stages and it was expected that the number of CCABs would increase substantially, to the point where it should be possible to establish geographically-focused teams of three or more.

Recognition of scheme: ASAB should take steps to ensure that CCAB becomes the recognised qualification in this field, e.g. by involvement in the drafting of the new VSA.

Training of supervisors: Many CCABs might require training in supervision and assessment.

Group discussion of issues raised.

There was a wide-ranging discussion of the issues raised by the individual breakout groups. The main areas of concern centered around some academic institutions' desire for greater clarification on the assessment of trainees.

Assessment: There was a discussion of the processes by which a trainee might move on from one level to another. Concerns were raised by some of the academic institutions as to whether acceptance of progression from one level to another was conditional only on the trainee observing or contributing to a set number of cases, or whether progression needed to be the product of a more active process of assessment? If progression is the product of an active process of agreed assessment, it was asked, who would make this decision? It was pointed out that, as was identified by the practitioners in their breakout session, any decision on progression must depend on an assessment of competency from a supervising practitioner. It was also accepted that there was a need for the ASAB accreditation committee to more clearly define learning/performance outcomes for each of the three levels of supervised experience. These would provide institutions and practitioners with a set of standards against which to judge a trainee's ability and progress.

It was suggested that the learning outcomes should clearly address whether supervised experience can be gained in parallel to academic knowledge, or whether it is necessary for a trainee to complete their academic training before they moved on to gaining supervised experience. At present, under the ASAB scheme, the expectation has been that level 1, and an element of level 2, supervision can be gained alongside academic knowledge but that a trainee should have fulfilled the majority of the academic standards set by ASAB before they seek to progress on to level 3.

Supervision: Whilst both academic institutions and practitioners recognized there was a need for supervisors to receive training in supervision and assessment, some academic institutions were concerned as to who would validate that the supervision being provided was to a standard, and that these standards were compatible between supervisors. The question was raised as to whether there would be a system for accrediting supervisors, or some requirement for training? The accreditation committee indicated it would consider this question, but pointed out that it was normally the responsibility of employers to ascertain whether an employee had the necessary skills to carry out their job.

Recommendations

The following recommendations and themes emerged from the workshop:

- **Fees:** Trainees seeking supervised experience should expect to pay a fee in future that is sufficient to recover costs associated with training. It is likely that individuals wishing to gain supervision at the highest level may have to seek support through bursaries or scholarships, which may be offered by academic institutions, charities or other interested bodies.
- **Assessment of learning:** The ASAB accreditation committee need to draft clear learning/performance outcomes for the three levels of supervised experience identified in its certification scheme, to allow the unambiguous assessment of all individuals undergoing supervision, irrespective of background or previous training. These outcomes will provide an unambiguous standard against which academic institutions, practitioners and trainees can judge performance and will encourage greater consistency in training. Progression between these levels must be the result of an agreed process between the trainee, supervisor and academic institution.
- **Greater dialogue:** Practitioners and academic institutions keen to participate in delivering supervised experience need to engage in greater dialogue to develop courses and to better meet the needs of trainees. Whilst a partnership between academic institutions and practitioners is to be encouraged, provision of supervised experience is not only the remit of the academic institutions and training by independent, individual CCAB's is still likely to have a role to play.
- **Training of supervisors.** There is a clearly identified need and demand by both academic institutions and practitioners for the training of clinical animal behaviourists in supervision and assessment. There is an opportunity for an academic institution, or other body, to provide courses that address this need.

Workshop delegates

The following delegates attended the workshop:

David Appleby	ASAB Committee / University of Cambridge / CCAB
Professor Christopher Barnard	ASAB Committee / University of Nottingham
Jon Bowen	RVC
Dr John Bradshaw	ASAB Committee / University of Bristol
Donna Brander	University of Edinburgh / APBC / CCAB
Dr Toby Carter	APU
Dr Rachel Casey	University of Bristol
Dr John Edison	University of Plymouth
Myfanwy Griffith	Bishop Burton College
Dr Caroline Hahn	University of Edinburgh
Sheila Hamilton-Andrews	ASAB Committee / UKRCB / CCAB
Sarah Heath	ASAB Committee / RCVS / University of Liverpool
Lindsey Hewitson	Hartpury College
Dr Lisa Leaver	University of Exeter
Emma Magnus	ASAB Committee / CCAB
Professor Stephen May	RVC
Dr Anne McBride	University of Southampton
Professor Daniel Mills	ASAB Committee / ISAE / University of Lincoln
Alison Murray	Myerscough College
Dr Charlotte Nevison	APU
Dr Anabela Pinto	University of Cambridge
Kendal Shepherd	CCAB
Morag Sutherland	CABSTG
Dr Stephen Wickens	ASAB Committee