

P-06-1391 Introduce regulation of the dog grooming - Correspondence from the Petitioner to the Committee, 26 February 2024

Ref: P-06-1391

The regulation of the dog grooming industry in Wales is a long overdue necessity. The entire sector exists in an unregulated environment, posing risks to both animal welfare and the rights of dog owners.

Reasons for Regulation:

- **Animal Welfare Concerns:** Unregulated practices can lead to neglect, abuse, or mishandling of animals, resulting in physical or psychological harm. The enormous growth in dog ownership over the last four years has not been matched by safeguards in dog breeding and informed responsible dog ownership. Compounded by an adverse economic climate this had led to an appetite for cost cutting and increased numbers of enthusiastic, but hidden grooming service providers. Unchecked and unlicensed, the industry is responsible for the care, welfare and essential health maintenance of valued family pets. With visits typically every 6 to 8 weeks, most dogs normally visit a groomer far more often than a vet.
- **Consumer Assurance:** No regulation has led to inconsistent service quality, hygiene standards, and potential health hazards for both pets and owners. There is no minimum service standardization. Due to the nature of the sector, groomers often work alone and can be quite isolated from best practice. No register of accredited practitioners exists in Wales, with a confusing qualification framework offering owners no comparable insight.
- **Professional Standards:** The regulation of grooming services would ensure that groomers adhere to industry competency standards, maintain CPD training, and use safe grooming techniques and products. The only method accessible to Welsh dog owners to verify best practice is through online reviews, a wholly inappropriate method to prioritise animal welfare.

- **Public Safety:** Poorly trained groomers can inadvertently cause injuries to pets or transmit diseases, posing risks to public health. Health and Safety legislation, the requirements of COSHH and the Animal Welfare Act 2006. Under the 2006 Act, within its 5 welfare needs, it states the 'need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease', the only method to ensure this protection within the sector is through regulation. There is currently no requirement for any animal first aid training or even insurance of any kind. As no form of oversight body exists, no remedies are available for malpractice or disputes raised by a dog owner.

Impact on Related Sectors and Promotion Of Responsible Dog Ownership

Regulation of grooming services will serve as a precedent for implementing standards in other animal service sectors, promoting consistency and accountability across the board. Groomers often collaborate with dog walkers, boarders and breeders, ensuring regulated grooming practices will influence a culture of enhanced welfare standards. It signals a commitment to responsible pet care, shaping public attitudes towards the importance of investing in the assured well being of their pet and it's welfare. By setting standards it brings valuable access to current data and information on dog ownership in Wales. This facilitates further initiatives to be introduced efficiently into the sector and also essential government engagement with owners.

Impact on Welsh Language and Identity:

Regulation can be an avenue to integrate Welsh language into official documentation and training materials, fostering linguistic diversity and promoting Welsh identity. Welsh-speaking groomers and pet owners will feel more included and represented in a regulated environment, strengthening community ties and cultural pride. A new initiative to introduce a Qualifications Wales regulated Level 1 Dog Grooming Course, delivered in Welsh is currently being formulated as a vocational pathway for 14-16 year olds.

Scotland has already initiated a similar consultation with regard to the grooming sector. England is far behind the developments of the devolved nations.

Representation of Grooming Practitioners

Currently, the AWW and CFSG allows for the inclusion of the Pet Industry Federation (PIF) as a member. However, PIF as a trade association does not represent or engage with the grooming sector. It has no sector experience or training/education capacity. It is a private limited company with the associated motives and objectives. It exists amongst a wide ranging representative body of third sector organisations and charities based in Wales, without having any point of contact in Wales. PIF has not supported this petition or the Scottish developments.

The only grooming practitioner led, not for profit and grooming community based representation is provided by the British Isles Grooming Association (BIGA). They currently have Associate Member status within the CFSG. To ensure the AWW has relevant input from the sector it is essential they become members at their next membership renewal. It also would assist the AWW for their inclusion within The Licensing of Animal Activities Working Group. They also benefit from a strong representative base in Wales.

Developments following the Petition start date include:

dogs.cymru has been created to introduce an online hub for Wales to facilitate engagement with owners, dog sector businesses/organisations and other stakeholders. Currently, the only advice available to owners is via the Welsh Government site. This is the only reference to grooming:

Code of Practice for the Welfare of Dogs – November 2018

Grooming

5.14 Certain coat types will need more attention than others and will need grooming daily to stop it from matting or tangling. However, all dogs need regular grooming and occasional bathing to keep their skin and coats well maintained. You will need a brush and comb suited to your dog's type of coat. Seek advice from your vet or pet care specialist if you are unsure about grooming your dog.

It would massively improve efforts to inform, educate and raise standards if the dogs.cymru online resource was developed for the benefit of all dogs in Wales. We welcome any collaboration the Welsh Government would wish to create a national online resource.

BIGA Best Practice Approved

The British Isles Grooming Association has developed an online Best Practice assessment covering:

- Animal Care and Welfare
- Health and Safety
- Community Support For Groomers
- Equality & Fairness
- Communication/Customer Relations
- Education and CPD
- Professionalism
- Legal Responsibilities
- Insurance

Free to members it would offer a 2 year Assured status. This would allow for a minimum entry level test of Best Practice, and allows a bridging of gap between experience versus formal regulated qualifications, which have all of these elements included already.

In conclusion, the introduction of regulation of the grooming sector would give dogs higher welfare protection. A minimum assurance of Best Practice will aid regulatory authorities in establishing a framework that feeds into any inspection/licensing requirements. A clearly signposted online information hub to engage with owners, businesses and stakeholders. These first efforts should have a substantial influence on all dog related businesses as the public becomes more informed and engaged regarding the welfare of their pet.

May I take this opportunity to acknowledge the excellent communication of all Welsh Government staff and the ease of petition creation, functionality and it's processes. Thank you!