

JOB DESCRIPTION

Job Title:	Lead Animal Behaviourist
Location:	Dunfermline / Hybrid working with regular travel across Scotland
Reports To:	Veterinary & Behaviour Director
Responsible For:	Regional Behaviourist team
Contacts:	Veterinary & Behaviour Director, Regional Behaviourists, Lead Veterinary Surgeon, Veterinary Clinic Manager, Veterinary Surgeons, Lead Wildlife Veterinary Surgeon, Domestic Animal Welfare Lead, Exotic & Wild Animal Welfare Lead, Head of Centre Operations, Adoption and Fostering Lead, Centre Managers and ARRC teams, Health and Safety Manager, Inspectorate, Animal Rescue Officers, Learning and Development, People, the Ethics and Policy Committee, volunteers, foster carers, adopters and members of the public. Externally: academic institutions, referral practices, professional bodies and other welfare organisations.

Purpose of the Role:

The Lead Animal Behaviourist is the Scottish SPCA's professional authority on animal behaviour. The postholder leads the Regional Behaviourist team and is accountable for the quality of behaviour assessment, modification and rehabilitation across the Society, and for the outcomes that work achieves for animals.

Behaviour is one of the principal determinants of how long an animal stays in our care, how well it copes while it is here, and whether it goes on to a lasting home or release. The postholder is accountable for improving those outcomes: shortening stays, reducing returns and giving more animals the chance of a settled life, while keeping colleagues, adopters and the public safe.

The role leads the development of the behaviour service, so that support reaches animals early, while it can still change the outcome, and so that the Society can show the difference behaviour work makes.

Key Responsibilities:

Professional authority and standards

- Act as the Society's acknowledged expert in animal behaviour, advising colleagues at all levels, the public, external agencies and, where required, courts, regulators and inquiries, setting out complex behavioural reasoning at a level the audience can act on.
- Own the Society's professional standards for behaviour assessment, modification and rehabilitation, keeping practice evidence-led, ethically sound and consistent with contemporary behavioural science and the Five Domains Model.

- Make sure behaviour work focuses on what can be changed safely, and that animals are placed where an adopter can reasonably meet their needs.
- Provide behavioural input to case decisions about rehoming, release and, where necessary, euthanasia on behavioural grounds, making sure every option that could improve the outcome has been considered.
- Identify the need for policy and procedural change on behaviour and welfare, and contribute to Society-wide policy through research, professional networks and external consultation.

Improving outcomes for animals

- Develop early behavioural support from arrival, so that needs are identified and addressed before they affect welfare or length of stay.
- Oversee behaviour modification and rehabilitation plans that can be delivered in the centre environment and carried on in the new home.
- Work with centre, fostering and adoption teams to improve matching, and support adopters after adoption so that placements last and fewer animals are returned.
- Improve the care environment for behaviour, including enrichment, low-stress and cooperative handling, and the use of foster placements for animals that struggle in kennels or catteries.
- Set and track outcome measures, including length of stay, returns, post-adoption incidents and welfare in care, and use them to direct the service and demonstrate its impact.

Leading the team

- Lead and line manage the Regional Behaviourist team, ensuring a consistent professional approach across Scotland, equitable caseload and appropriate regional cover.
- Lead a dispersed team through structured monthly one-to-ones, supporting performance and wellbeing and building a culture of open feedback, reflective practice and psychological safety, with active regard to compassion fatigue.
- Establish the team's ways of working, including clinical supervision, peer review, case audit, standard report formats and response times, and act as the point of escalation for the most complex cases.
- Lead recruitment, induction, performance management and development planning, identifying talent and creating opportunities for colleagues to develop behavioural skills and progress.

Service delivery

- Develop and deliver the operating plan for the behaviour service, aligning capacity to the Society's intake, rehabilitation and rehoming demands.
- Run a single referral route and a duty behaviourist rota with clear response times, so that cover does not depend on the availability of individuals.
- Set caseload prioritisation criteria, referral thresholds and escalation routes, so that referrals are made for an animal's welfare and prospects as well as for colleague safety.

- Contribute to setting and managing the behaviour budget, including training and equipment, ensuring resources are deployed to maximum welfare effect.
- Lead behaviour projects and contribute behavioural expertise to wider Society change programmes, producing plans, progress updates and risk mitigation.

Governance, risk and compliance

- Hold clinical governance for the behaviour service, including case audit, peer review of significant case decisions and structured reflection on outcomes, providing assurance to the Veterinary & Behaviour Director.
- Ensure behavioural assessments, plans, recommendations and information given to adopters are recorded accurately and contemporaneously, to a standard that withstands professional, legal and public scrutiny and complies with data protection law and Society policy.
- Ensure incidents, near misses and adverse outcomes involving animal behaviour, including bites and injuries, are reported, investigated and used to improve practice, and escalate behavioural risk as required.
- Maintain the Society's behaviour policies, procedures, assessment tools and recording systems, keeping them current and evidence-led, and work with the Health and Safety Manager so that behaviour work is covered by suitable risk assessments and safe systems of work.
- Work with prescribing veterinary surgeons on behavioural medication, keeping the respective roles of vet and behaviourist clear under the Veterinary Medicines Regulations and the RCVS Code of Professional Conduct.

Building capability and external profile

- Work with Learning and Development to design and refresh behaviour training for veterinary, centre, response, helpline and fostering colleagues, building behavioural competence at first line.
- Lead the animal handling and behaviour competency framework, including the tiered route for Animal Care Assistants, Senior Animal Care Assistants and volunteers, and the escalation from them to the behaviour team.
- Represent the Society externally, maintaining networks with academic institutions, referral practices and other welfare organisations so protocols adapt as new techniques and evidence emerge, and advocating in professional and media settings as required.

Values and conduct

- Model the Society's core values of Committed, Compassionate, Professional, Expert, Collaborative and Adaptable, and foster collaborative, welfare-focused working across departments.
- Uphold health, safety and infection control, maintaining high standards of cleanliness and biosecurity, and comply with data protection, client confidentiality and organisational security at all times.
- Act as a positive ambassador for the Scottish SPCA, supporting public events, media engagement and fundraising as required, and comply with all Society policies and procedures.

Person Specification:

	Essential	Desirable
Education & Qualifications	Registered with the ABTC as a Clinical Animal Behaviourist, certificated as a CCAB, or MRCVS with a recognised postgraduate qualification in clinical animal behaviour Evidence of substantial and current CPD in behaviour	RCVS Advanced Practitioner or Recognised Specialist status in behavioural medicine Qualification in animal welfare, leadership or management Teaching, assessing or clinical supervision qualification
Experience & Job Knowledge	Specialist clinical animal behaviour experience, sufficient to act as an internal and external authority in the field Substantial hands-on assessment and modification of behaviour across multiple species, including complex aggression and severe anxiety in dogs and cats Structured, evidence-based behaviour assessment, and a clear understanding of what behavioural assessments can and cannot predict A track record of improving outcomes for animals through behaviour modification and rehabilitation Proven people leadership, including managing performance, developing individuals and supervising or reviewing other practitioners' casework Behavioural pharmacology, and the respective roles of the prescribing veterinary surgeon and the behaviourist under the Veterinary Medicines Regulations 2013 (as amended) and the RCVS Code Behavioural decision-making in a rehoming setting, including euthanasia on behavioural grounds, and its wider impact on colleagues, owners and adopters	Rescue, rehoming or charitable welfare environment Remote or dispersed line management Leading and embedding organisational change Using data to evaluate and improve service outcomes Writing policy, procedures or professional standards Designing competency frameworks or tiered training Establishing and managing partnerships nationally and locally Conducting research, or published or presented work in the behaviour field Providing expert opinion in legal, regulatory or media settings Behaviour work with species beyond dogs and cats Managing a budget Working with volunteers and foster carers

	The behavioural impact of the kennel and cattery environment, and capacity for care Assessing and controlling risk to people when working with animals that may cause serious injury Working knowledge of animal welfare and dog control law in Scotland, including the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006, the Control of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2010 and the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, and commitment to health and safety at work	
Job Related Skills / Competencies	Exceptional professional judgement, able to reach and defend difficult decisions on incomplete information Strong analytical skills and attention to detail, able to interpret scientific data Reconcile conflicting behavioural, clinical, operational and welfare information into a workable formulation Exceptional written and verbal communication, conveying complex behavioural concepts to non-specialists and to those who disagree Secure cooperation across working areas without direct authority Lead, motivate and develop a dispersed professional team Identify areas for improvement, weigh options and implement change Plan and organise service delivery across multiple regions in the short, medium and long term Digital and record-keeping skills, with confidence in the M365 suite and operational systems and the ability to	Presentation, public speaking and training delivery skills Media experience Project management skills

	evidence outcomes through data	
Personal attributes	Passion for animal welfare and an advocate of our charitable purpose Evidence-led and inquisitive, ready to listen to new arguments and to change position when the evidence changes Inclusive and non-judgemental in approach Resilient and calm, able to hold a professional position under pressure and allay concerns, and emotionally resilient in the demanding aspects of welfare work, able to support others through them Acts with professional integrity and within the limits of professional competence Solutions-focused and collaborative, able to remove blockers and work well within a multi-disciplinary team Embraces a culture of open 360 feedback, delivering it sensitively and welcoming it openly	Interest in contributing to the published evidence base for shelter behaviour
Additional relevant criteria	Full, clean driving licence and willingness to travel extensively across Scotland, including overnight stays Willingness to work occasional evenings, weekends and public holidays as business requires, including a share of the duty behaviourist rota Membership of the Disclosure Scotland PVG Scheme, or willingness to join	