Executive Summary

Amongst the objectives outlined in the European Union Strategy for the Protection and Welfare of Animals 2012-2015 (COM (2012) 6 final/2) it was stated that a study on animal welfare education would be undertaken. The main objective of this project was to identify the level of understanding of animal welfare issues within diverse groups and, where deficiencies were identified, to suggest means of improving knowledge levels through education and the dissemination of information. The study addressed two target groups referred to in broad terms as 'General public, students and consumers' and 'Professionals working with animals'.

The information was gathered from a representative sampling of each stakeholder group through face to face interviews, in selected Member States: Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Spain, Sweden and the UK. Questionnaires were tailor-made for each specific group of respondents. In addition, a case study was undertaken in Austria.

The interviewees, 7,741 in total, included people with no direct connection to animal welfare issues, such as the general public, students and consumers. It also involved those actively employed in industries where animal welfare is an integral part of their working lives, from veterinarians to animal transporters and NGOs. Several in-depth interviews were also carried out with key players in the field of animal welfare. In addition, the study identified activities relating to education and information on animal welfare aimed at both students and the general public which are currently in place at European level.

For the general public, students and consumers, the most obvious conclusion is that the level of knowledge amongst non-professionals is very limited despite the often laudable efforts of NGOs. This can only be addressed by a concerted, centrally-driven effort along with the active participation and collaboration of organisations in Member States. Students are seen as the most obvious target and it was generally believed that animal welfare would be better understood if it were introduced into the curriculum at an early age preferably combined with visits to commercial farms. There could also be greater use of all forms of media to help spread a strategic message. However, it is not suggested that information on animal welfare be provided in isolation. It is best presented when associated with other topics of importance to the general public, such as nutrition, health and sustainability.

With regard to the professional group, it is impossible to draw a single conclusion given that the level of training differs between professions. Unsurprisingly, veterinarians typically demonstrate more knowledge than many others working in related fields. This study recommends the creation of guidelines on animal welfare education for professionals, followed by the establishment of a standardised approach to assessing successes and impact.

This report presents the main findings of the study and the supporting arguments for the conclusions. Additional information is included in the appendix.

1 http://ec.europa.eu/food/animals/docs/aw_eu_strategy_19012012_en.pdf