



Research Office  
Legislative Council Secretariat

## Fact Sheet

# Animal welfare education in schools in selected places

FS04/20-21

## 1. Introduction

1.1 In past two decades or so, growing awareness of animal rights and concern about animal welfare have prompted many places around the world to devise measures to prevent cases of animal neglect, abuse and abandonment. Some have introduced regulatory measures through imposing a positive "duty of care" on persons responsible for animals to provide for their welfare needs, as well as setting more stringent penalties for animal cruelty offences. There are also some other places making use of public education on animal welfare as a key measure to safeguard animal rights and prevent abuse cases. In particular, they have stepped up the education efforts on integrating animal welfare topics in the school curricula so as to build up citizens' understanding of animal rights and respect for animals from a young age.

1.2 At the request of the Subcommittee to Study Issues Relating to Animal Rights, the Research Office has prepared this fact sheet on animal welfare education in schools in selected places to facilitate the deliberation of the Subcommittee on the subject matter. The fact sheet highlights the ways in which Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and Austria implement animal welfare education in schools in terms of the objectives, approach, content and support measures of the related education programmes. Taiwan and Austria are selected for the study as they have mandated animal welfare education for students and/or the youth in their animal protection legislation. Singapore is also studied for its inclusion of animal welfare in the curricula of primary and secondary schools.

## 2. Hong Kong

2.1 In Hong Kong, the growing prevalence of pet ownership has brought with it increased awareness of and concern about animal welfare.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, the number of complaints about suspected animal cruelty had been on the rise from 236 in 2015 to 288 in 2019, and the number of persons convicted under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Ordinance (Cap. 169) increased from 10 to 25 during the period.<sup>2, 3</sup> As such, there have been repeated calls for the Government to step up publicity and public education on animal care and responsible pet ownership, including providing related education in the formal curricula of primary and secondary schools.<sup>4</sup>

2.2 Indeed, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department ("AFCD") has been promoting messages of responsible pet ownership and proper care for animals through public education and publicity programmes. To this end, it has conducted public education and publicity activities ranging from holding seminars at schools/housing estates<sup>5</sup> and organizing events, to producing announcements in the public interest on television/radio and placing advertising on various channels.<sup>6</sup> In addition, AFCD has provided subventions to eligible animal welfare organizations since 2011 to support their work in promoting animal welfare on a project basis, including conducting education seminars at schools and in the community.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> According to the Thematic Household Survey conducted by the Census and Statistics Department, it was estimated that the number of dogs and cats kept as pets totalled 221 100 and 184 100 respectively in 2018. Some 241 900 or 9.4% of households in Hong Kong kept pet dogs/cats. See Census and Statistics Department (2019).

<sup>2</sup> According to the results of investigations, most of the cases did not involve cruelty to animals. See GovHK (2017) and Food and Health Bureau (2021).

<sup>3</sup> See Food and Health Bureau (2018 & 2021).

<sup>4</sup> See Legislative Council Secretariat (2016) and Minutes of Meeting of the Subcommittee to Study Issues Relating to Animal Rights (2017).

<sup>5</sup> According to the latest departmental annual report of AFCD, a total of 105 seminars were held at schools and housing estates in 2018-2019. See Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (2019).

<sup>6</sup> In 2020-2021, AFCD incurred HK\$22 million in implementing various public education and publicity programmes for promoting animal welfare. See Food and Health Bureau (2021).

<sup>7</sup> In 2020-2021, about HK\$1.4 million was granted to 11 animal welfare organizations under the subvention programmes. See Food and Health Bureau (2021).

2.3 Regarding school education, learning content related to life education, such as understanding and respecting life and caring for animals, has been incorporated into the curriculum of kindergartens and relevant subjects in primary and secondary schools. For example, "to respect, appreciate and care for nature" is one of the learning objectives of the learning area "Nature and Living" in the kindergarten curriculum. As for the primary curriculum, students learn to care for animals in General Studies. Meanwhile, secondary school students learn about how humans can live in harmony with animals and show respect for all living things in Science at the junior secondary level and Biology at the senior secondary level. Under the moral and civic education curricula of primary and secondary schools, "Care for Others" is one of the priority values to be nurtured among students, and "caring for animals is my duty" is one of the "life event" exemplars adopted to help students learn about respecting life and caring for animals.<sup>8</sup>

2.4 According to the Government, schools are also advised to select life events related to students' development and everyday life, and use a variety of approaches, such as morning assemblies, life education lessons, seminars and life-wide learning activities (e.g. visits). This is to deepen students' understanding of the relevant topics and encourage them to actively explore and consider the preciousness of life, thereby developing their positive values and attitudes and learning how to respect and cherish life.<sup>9</sup>

### 3. Taiwan

3.1 In Taiwan, the government has progressively reformed its animal welfare regulatory regime over the past two decades, in a move to enhance animal protection amid the growth in pet population<sup>10</sup> and rising concern about stray animals and animal abuse. One of the latest reform measures was the amendment of the Animal Protection Act in December 2018 to stipulate the requirement for the government authorities to promote awareness of animal welfare and related regulations through public education, including instilling such knowledge throughout the 12-year basic education curriculum.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See GovHK (2020).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> The number of dogs and cats kept as pets reached 2.3 million in 2019, up by 48% from 2009. See 動物保護資訊網(2019 年).

<sup>11</sup> In Taiwan, the 12-year basic education system comprises (a) six years of elementary school; (b) three years of junior high school; and (c) three years of senior high school.

By mandating animal welfare education in schools, the government aims to nurture citizens' understanding of and respect for the life of animals, and build up their animal protection awareness and knowledge from a young age. The government also commits to strengthening animal welfare education at the school and community levels in the White Paper on Animal Welfare released in 2019.<sup>12</sup> The White Paper sets out public education as one of the major strategies to develop Taiwan as an animal-friendly society.

3.2 The Ministry of Education of Taiwan has adopted the approach of integrating animal welfare topics or issues into the learning areas of life education, moral education and environment education of the school curricula, and the subject matter will be taught under various relevant subjects. It set up a dedicated group in early 2019 to support the implementation of mandatory animal welfare education in schools. The group comprises animal welfare organizations and academia which are entrusted with compiling teaching materials and resources such as worksheets and videos for the reference of teachers in elementary and high schools. The initial set of teaching materials and resources launched in early 2020 focuses on relationship between humans and companion animals. Teaching materials related to farm animals and performing animals will be developed at a later stage. In a further effort to engage the schools in animal welfare education and promote care and respect for animals among students, the Ministry of Education has also organized activities such as story writing and video making competitions under themes related to protecting companion animals.

## 4. Singapore

4.1 Singapore has seen heightened public concern about animal rights and protection in recent years, in light of the rising pet population<sup>13</sup> and number of alleged complaints about animal abuse and cruelty since the early 2010s.<sup>14</sup> In response, the government has enhanced animal welfare education by

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<sup>12</sup> See 行政院農業委員會(2019 年).

<sup>13</sup> It was estimated that the total number of pet dogs and pet cats kept in Singapore increased from 165 700 in 2014 to 196 600 in 2019. See The Business Times (2020).

<sup>14</sup> The number of alleged animal cruelty complaints received and investigated by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals of Singapore reached a high of 1 017 cases in 2011-2012. In the same year, the now-defunct Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority also investigated 444 complaints of alleged animal cruelty. See Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority of Singapore (2012) and Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals of Singapore (2012).

introducing an animal welfare module in the Character and Citizenship Education ("CCE") syllabus of primary and secondary schools to build up students' compassion and respect for animals.<sup>15</sup> Schools have the flexibility to design their own CCE programmes,<sup>16</sup> and they have delivered CCE (including animal welfare topics) through classroom lessons and learning experiences and activities outside school.

4.2 The delivery of animal welfare education under the CCE syllabus has been supported by the National Parks Board ("NParks")<sup>17</sup> and animal welfare organizations. NParks has designed an education programme on responsible pet ownership to complement the CCE lesson on animal welfare.<sup>18</sup> The programme targets at all primary four students to foster their understanding about the importance of animal welfare and promote responsible and considerate pet ownership. NParks has also conducted assembly talks at schools; lent exhibition panels for display at schools to educate students to be considerate towards pets and wildlife; and provided online resources for teachers to prepare their animal welfare lessons. On the other hand, some animal welfare organizations have provided education services, such as delivering assembly talks, organizing visits to their premises and assisting in student-driven learning activities, to facilitate learning about animal welfare and responsible pet ownership.

## 5. Austria

5.1 In Austria, education to promote understanding of animal protection among the general public (particularly the young people) is mandated under the

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<sup>15</sup> The CCE syllabus, which was launched in 2014, emphasizes the interconnectedness of the core values, social and emotional competencies, and civic literacy, global awareness and cross-cultural skills of students that are crucial for their development into active and concerned citizens. Specifically, the core values include respect, responsibility, integrity, care, resilience and harmony.

<sup>16</sup> According to the Ministry of Education, the total CCE curriculum time is 60 hours per year for students at the lower primary level and secondary level, and 75 hours per year for students at the upper primary level. However, the time to be spent on the animal welfare module is planned by schools themselves. See Ministry of Education (2012a & 2012b).

<sup>17</sup> NParks is a statutory board responsible for enhancing and managing the urban ecosystems of Singapore. It is the lead agency for greenery, biodiversity conservation, and wildlife and animal health, welfare and management.

<sup>18</sup> The education programme features paper craft activities to encourage hands-on play while teaching students about pet care and animal ethology.

Animal Protection Act 2004.<sup>19, 20</sup> Meanwhile, the Austrian government has covered animal welfare education in the curricula of primary and secondary schools,<sup>21</sup> through the integration of related topics in the lessons of science, biology, language and other relevant subjects, as well as through other learning experiences or activities. While topics related to companion animals are generally covered at the primary school level, those related to farm animals are covered at the secondary school level.

5.2 To support the implementation of animal welfare education in schools, the Austrian government has subsidized the Association for Animal Welfare Education (Tierschutz macht Schule) ("TmS")<sup>22</sup> to develop relevant teaching materials and resources and provide relevant education services to students and teachers. The major activities of TmS include:

- (a) developing workbook series for free distribution to primary and secondary school students;
- (b) conducting workshops for students in schools or outside schools e.g. at farms or animal shelters; and
- (c) developing teaching resources and conducting training sessions for teachers.

5.3 The teaching materials and resources developed by TmS have been widely used by students and teachers. Since the establishment of TmS in 2006, over 3 300 schools and education institutions have ordered teaching materials from TmS and over 780 000 copies of teaching materials have been distributed to students. The achievement of TmS has also inspired the animal welfare education efforts in other member states of the European Union.

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<sup>19</sup> Austria has a large pet animal and farm animal population. In 2019, the number of dogs and cats kept as pets was estimated at 2.5 million. About 13% of households kept pet dogs and 30% kept pet cats. The population of cattle and pigs kept reached 1.86 million and 2.81 million respectively as at 1 December 2020. See Statistics Austria (2021) and The European Pet Food Industry (2020).

<sup>20</sup> Austria has relatively advanced animal welfare laws by international standards, and the Animal Protection Act 2004 provides the comprehensive regulatory framework to protect the life and well-being of animals in the country.

<sup>21</sup> The Austrian education system comprises (a) four years of primary education; (b) four years of lower secondary education; and (c) four to five years of upper secondary education depending on the programme stream taken (general versus vocational education stream).

<sup>22</sup> Established in 2006, TmS is a non-governmental organization tasked to improve the living conditions of pets, farm animals, laboratory animals and wild animals within Austria.

## 6. Concluding remarks

6.1 In Hong Kong and other places studied, public education (particularly for the school children and the youth) has been considered and adopted as a key measure to promote animal welfare and safeguard the rights of animals. Among them, Taiwan and Austria have set out in the relevant animal protection legislation the requirement for the government authorities to provide animal welfare education to students/youths.

6.2 Meanwhile, all the places studied are similar in their approach of (a) integrating animal welfare topics or issues in the relevant learning areas of the school curricula; and (b) supplementing the school teaching materials with other learning experiences such as talks and visits. At schools, the specific subjects which are taught for relevant animal welfare topics/issues will depend on students' level of education. For example, Hong Kong's students learn to care for animals in General Studies at the primary level and science subjects at the secondary level. While the animal welfare topics or content covered under the school curricula differ among the places studied, the general objectives are to inculcate compassion and empathy for animals, promote harmonious human-animal relationship and/or nurture responsible pet ownership.

6.3 To facilitate the implementation of animal welfare education in schools, all the overseas places studied have engaged relevant government bodies, animal welfare organizations and/or academia to compile teaching materials and resources for teachers' adoption or reference, and/or conduct training for teachers.

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