



Pets change lives
We change theirs



RDOC
Impact report
2025



What long-term impact does Responsible Dog Ownership Course attendance have

In 2019 Blue Cross embarked on a pilot project with West Midlands Police to provide a Responsible Dog Ownership Course (RDOC) for low level Section 3 Dangerous Dog Act Offences (a dog of any breed being dangerously out of control).

Using human behaviour change principles, the RDOC aims to improve the relationship between dogs and their owners – keeping pets and people together and giving owners the tools and confidence to manage their dogs' behaviour. It also works to:

- improve owner understanding of the law around dogs and how to stay within it
- help owners understand their dog's body language
- provide practical tips and advice on training and muzzling
- explain where to find extra expert help and advice

What our partners think of us

The RDOC is a successful out of court disposal, and our partner police forces and Local Authorities appreciate the value of supporting people with a form of education, rather than a fine in isolation. The RDOC team has even been described as 'a joy to work with' by a member of Gwent Police.

In 2020 we began delivering the course online via Zoom, and it now incorporates referrals from over 40 different police forces and local authority partners around the country.

In 2024 the RDOC team delivered 30 online courses to 562 participants.

Helping to keep communities safe

The national average for reoffending if someone is taken to court stands at 80%. This reduces to around 15-20% for those individuals who participate in a related education pathway. (Senior Observatory Analyst, Northants Police). This suggests that attending the RDOC could significantly reduce the risk of reoffending. Indeed, our reoffending rate currently stands at less than 1%.

Understanding the RDOC's impact

Although police satisfaction and the reoffending stats are highly encouraging, Blue Cross wanted to go further and understand whether people attending the course enacted any long-lasting changes in attitudes and behaviours.

This report is mainly based on 12 qualitative semi-structured interviews, which took place between 8 and 12 weeks after the participant had attended a course, all within 6 months of each other.

To enrich our understanding further, we also refer to other ways we gauge learning and satisfaction, such as the feedback form we send out the day after the course and the poll we ask participants to answer before we finish every session.

All interviews have been anonymised, so to differentiate between participants, we have assigned each a letter from **A – L**.

Results

After initial analysis we found we could categorise the answers into broad themes, which we explore below.

Feeling more confident

We asked participants if they felt more confident in their own ability to manage their dog's behaviour and interpret their dog's body language. 7 of the 12 felt much more confident to manage their dog's behaviour now, and 3 others said their confidence was high in the first place.

One of the respondents (**E**) who indicated they were already confident worked as a dog behaviourist. Interestingly, she felt the RDOC helped her move on from the incident that led to her attending the course.

"When there is an incident, you lose confidence in your dog because it is disheartening, but you get a chance to bond again, and the course encouraged us to go back to basic training and understanding why the dog responded that way in the first place."

- Participant **E**

From those who felt more confident, comments varied from "a bit [more confident]. I feel a higher level of awareness surrounding everything to do with dogs" (**I**) and "yes – I'm better at using the skills learnt" (**K**) to an emphatic "yes, I feel a lot more confident now" from **B**.

We put a simple poll up at the end of every session asking: 'Do you now feel more confident understanding and managing your dog's behaviour having completed the RDOC?' and this indicates a much higher improvement in confidence rate than the interviews. Currently, across all the RDOCs we have used the poll in, we have an average of 98% answering "yes".

The reported confidence improvement in interpreting dog body language better was 50%.

"The section on reading dog signs was really interesting. I wouldn't have picked it up before, but now we are more aware of when he is uncomfortable. We can now intervene earlier on."

- Participant **B**, who reported that they had learnt a lot

Those who said they experienced no improvement validated the point by explaining they already knew their dog's body language well.

It appeared several of the participants felt uncomfortable saying they could interpret their dog's body language better now – perhaps because they felt it implied they'd been bad at it previously. Comments like this from **D**, "I am very familiar with dog body language already", were not uncommon. This is in line with previous studies that recognise over confidence in understanding dog body language among owners (Dogs Trust, 2024; Meints et al, 2014).

However, some reported that it had made them think a little more about what they could see and what it meant. **I** said: "I didn't totally misunderstand the body language before, but I am now more aware of all of the signs that a dog is stressed." And though they reported no improvement in confidence **J** expressed, "it was good to have a refresher", reflecting the value in continuing to learn about dog body language even if it is a familiar subject.

Overall, the majority of research participants felt more confident about interpreting their dog and managing their dog's behaviour two to three months after the course.

Easy changes that can make a big difference

A few participants mentioned specific things that had changed in their routines and practices since attending the course. These included changing walk times and locations, being more aware of other dogs and the behaviour of people around them, and preventing other people from interacting with their dog.

L had changed the way she answers the door: “Whenever I am looking after him, I always put him in a room with a closed door if I am expecting a delivery driver or something.”

However, by far the most common changes were practical ones around the house or garden or with equipment used with the dog. Two people (including **A**) had changed the type of lead that they used, and one now muzzled his dog.


“We used a retractable lead before, and the course taught us that isn’t the best thing for a dog like him.”

- Participant **A**

Three had made their garden more secure, including making the fence higher in two cases; one had installed a chain on the door so it wouldn’t open wide enough for the dog to get out; one was now using a baby gate to keep the dog in a particular part of the house; and another had an external post box fitted.

“I have secured the house and garden so there is now a 6ft high fence all the way around the garden. It was my fault rather than the dog’s. I didn’t realise that the garden wasn’t completely secure already.”

-Participant **A**



Self-efficacy elements are embedded throughout the course, and these practical changes show that learnings can be taken away and implemented to help protect dogs, their owners and the public.

Knowledge to share

Strikingly, all except one participant said they had already shared information they learned from the course or would do so if a situation seemed to merit it. Participants reported sharing their knowledge with relatives, partners and friends, as well as within their wider communities including other dog owners, people that they met walking the dog and “anyone that would listen”!

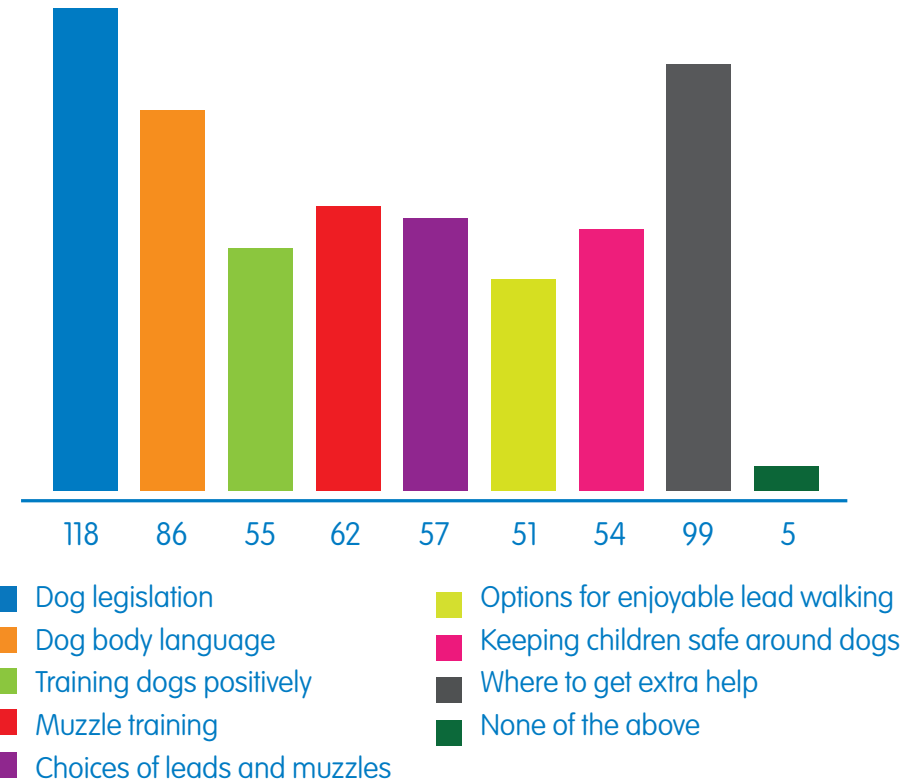
“I have shared a lot of information [from the course] with other people. People know I have lots of animals, and Shirley [dog] has a ‘do not approach’ vest now and I talk to people in public about it. . . I have talked to at least 50 different people such as family and friends and people that approach me on walks.”

- Participant **H**

G, a dog walker who was particularly disgruntled about having to attend the course, said: “In the course of my job I don’t really meet many other humans. . . [but if I did and] if I thought it was relevant I would do so.”

In the feedback survey we send out the day after an RDOC, the graph opposite represents what each attendee found most beneficial to them on the course: dog law and legislation, where to get extra help and understanding dog body language, all scored particularly highly – all fantastic messaging that can be passed on further by attendees.

There are notable benefits for individuals sharing their newfound knowledge, including increased self-efficacy, motivation, confidence and influencing social proof or commitment. The fact that most individuals consistently shared elements of what they had learnt supports sustainable behaviour changes.



A beneficial course to attend

11 of the 12 participants found the course beneficial. Even those with quite extensive knowledge of dog training felt they had learnt something new.

“Being able to access the course and having it as a way of ending the process with the police was hugely beneficial. . . . there was something in it for everyone. So even though I didn’t learn anything training wise, the legislation bit was really helpful.”

- Participant **C**

“The course was enlightening. . . I thought it was a good course, and I think it would be great for people getting a new dog”.

- Participant **A**

Our stats from our next-day feedback are similarly high on the question “How satisfied were you with the experience of attending the course?” with 90% responding either ‘satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’.

The participant who didn’t find it beneficial (**F**) answered negatively to everything. Unfortunately, she did not expand on any of her answers other than to share that she knew all the information already.

The simplest things sometimes make the biggest difference

We found it striking that in a couple of cases a single piece of information or advice made a significant difference to both the owners’ and the dogs’ lives.

“One of the biggest things I got out of the course, which I am very grateful for, is that I never knew about dog fields before, but there are two close to me and we go there now. He doesn’t like being on the lead, but with a field I can let him off the lead, and he can keep chasing the ball until he decides it’s time to go home. Really, really pleased about it. It has transformed my life.”

- Participant **D**

Enjoyment of course and intentional changes

Although our initial feedback survey currently doesn’t ask about intentions, we do ask what we did well and what we could improve. This is free text, and sometimes the answers here tell us about future intentions to change, along with indications of a more positive outlook.

“I have no negatives for the course, in fact it’s made me want to look at more courses to become more informed, confident and successful as a dog owner.”

“The course leaders were great; they made everything super easy to understand. They didn’t just talk at us, every few slides they got everyone engaged and involved in answering questions. They kept the course on a positive note while enforcing and explaining situations to do with the law and how to improve outcomes.”

“It was quite an interesting course that I definitely took tips and advice away from. I have already made changes to the way I walk and train my dog following the training.”



Conclusion

The sample participants included a range of people covering different ages, experience with dogs, incidents and education levels.

All except one felt they got something positive out of the course, and a number of long-term changes were made. These included practical changes like changing a lead or securing a garden, as well as changing walk routines and observing a dog's body language more carefully and acting upon what they had observed. All participants except one felt the course was beneficial, and the majority found it useful and even enjoyable to attend. Long-term, we can conclude that for most people the course has a positive and long-lasting impact.

This year we will be focusing on expansion of RDOC and aiming for full coverage of England and Wales by 2026 supporting more dogs and their owners and helping to keep communities safe.

[National Dog Survey, Dogs Trust \(2024\)](#)

Meints, K., Brelsford, V., Just, J., & de Keuster, T. (2014). How children and parents interpret dogs' body language.

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