

IAHAIO international guidelines for minimum standards for education and training in animal-assisted interventions (AAI)

1. Purpose of these guidelines

IAHAIO is committed to advancing the study and practice of all forms of animal-assisted interventions (AAI) in a way which ensures the health and safety, welfare and well-being of everyone involved – including humans and animals.

It is encouraging that there is an increasing number of education and training opportunities available to people who are already delivering animal-assisted interventions and to those who are new to the field. However, there needs to be confidence in the quality of these courses and programmes, in that:

- They are transparent in what they cover and what the participant will receive/not receive at the end, for example, a certificate or a qualification on a certain level, such as activity-based services or professionally-led services, or continuing education points
- They are delivered by people with appropriate experience and qualifications
- They address key components of human and animal welfare

Readers are encouraged to read the IAHAIO White Paper on '[Definitions for Animal Assisted Intervention and Guidelines for Wellness of Animals Involved](#)' (rev 2018) alongside these guidelines.

AAI covers a broad field with a lot of differences in different regions of the world. In this paper, a handler is defined as the person that is responsible for the animal and knows the animal very well or is the owner (e.g. with dogs). This means that a handler can be a person without a professional background working as volunteer in animal-assisted activities (AAA) but also a professional working in animal-assisted education (AAE), animal-assisted therapy (AAT) or animal-assisted coaching (AAC). However, in a lot of countries, handler is referred to as a volunteer working with his/her animal in AAA.

2. Aim of these guidelines

The aim of these guidelines is to outline the minimum standards for education and training in AAI, thereby providing a baseline for all programmes to produce good quality content. This is a first step in the process of harmonizing guidelines internationally. It is acknowledged that some programmes

will exceed these minimal requirements, and this is encouraged.

3. Who are these guidelines aimed at?

These guidelines will be helpful for:

- Those co-ordinating and delivering educational programmes aimed at volunteers and professionals delivering activity-based services and professionally-led services in animal-assisted interventions
- Volunteers and professionals who are new to the field and want to undertake training in animal-assisted interventions
- Volunteers and professionals who established in the field who want to undertake further training as part of their continued personal and professional development

4. Development of these guidelines

IAHAIO undertook a review of the criteria for education and training published by all accrediting organizations from around the globe, as well as standards of different umbrella organizations. The list of organizations included:

- International Society for Animal-Assisted Interventions (ISAAT)
- European Society for Animal-Assisted Interventions (ESAAT)
- AAI International
- PATH International
- AKR (Netherlands)
- Pet Partners
- Swedish Standard Institute
- NCofA and Norwegian University of Life Sciences

5. Types of AAI services and education/training requirements

There are different levels of educational/training requirements depending on the roles undertaken in an animal-assisted intervention and the tasks that will be performed. The professional background, job experience and skills should also be considered.

1) Activity-based services

These relate to animal-assisted activities (AAA), most often delivered by volunteers, free of charge. Examples include visiting programmes.

Volunteers can deliver AAE/AAT/AAC only together with/under the supervision of a professional.

2) Professionally-led services

These are led by professionals who already hold a degree in the fields of education, coaching, therapy or medicine, and who have undertaken further training to specialise in AAT/AAE and AAC. Examples are therapist (including counsellors), coaches, social workers and educators.

Professionals may also deliver AAA with human-dog teams.

Developing forms of AAI

As the field expands and develops, new types of animal-assisted interventions are emerging. There are an increasing number of programmes, outside of the fields of AAT/AAE/AAC, delivered professionally by people who have specialist skills and training. These programmes are referred to as Animal-Assisted Special Programmes (AASP) (e.g. [Animal Assisted Intervention International – Supporting Animal Assisted Intervention \(aai-int.org\)](#)). Examples include formal crisis intervention department work (e.g. victim advocates), prison dog training classes that teach inmates life/job skills, community programmes for people with disabilities etc. on a voluntary or paid basis.

These IAHAIO guidelines outline the minimum standards for education and training for 1) and 2) above. Guidelines for newly-emerging services such as AASP will be published at a future date once the practices and education requirements are more established.

6. IAHAIO minimum standards for education and training in AAI

These are the IAHAIO criteria for programmes/courses that offer education and training in AAI, and outline the minimum standards that should be met. These can, of course, be exceeded. They aim to be helpful to course co-ordinators/directors/managers when designing and delivering training, as well as to course participants who are reviewing different courses with a view to undertaking training.

a) Clear communication of programme content and outcomes

IAHAIO recommends that all education/training providers clearly state on their materials:

- Who the course is suitable for (e.g. volunteers, professionals, type of AAI e.g. AAA/AAT etc)
- Pre-requisites/entry requirements (e.g. none, degree etc)
- Course duration
- Course content
- Course teachers/tutors, their background and qualifications
- Assessment (type of assessment e.g. written/oral or practical)
- Outcomes/qualification
 - What knowledge/experience will course participants gain from completing the course?
 - What will it enable them to do?
 - Is there a qualification to be gained?
 - Does it form part of other courses the participants can build on?

b) Animal-assisted activity training

This training is usually aimed at volunteers (often unpaid) who want to deliver AAA and/or work alongside professionals who lead AAT/AAE/AAC.

All volunteers involved in the delivery of AAA (or together with professionals in AAT/AAE/AAC) should complete a course/training with the following requirements. This guidance applies to volunteers working with a range of recommended species, as outlined in the [IAHAIO White Paper](#):

Content

Mandatory topics are:

- Principles of the human-animal relationship
- Principles of AAI (including models, methods, law, hygiene and risk management, suitability and selection)
- Keeping and training of animals
- Basics in psychology, education, medicine (dependent on area of work)
- Basics in ethology and veterinary medicine

Teacher qualifications

- Teachers in educational programs for animal-assisted activities need specialist training and knowledge (e.g. a degree, certification, qualification) in the field that they teach. Some of the teachers should have practical experience in AAI.

Entry requirements

- Everyone can attend courses, no degree required

Duration

Volunteers need to undertake a minimum of 70 hours training in total, divided as follows:

- Minimum of 20 hours seminars/lectures/structured course delivered by a teacher
- Minimum 25 hours practice (e.g. accompanying a practitioner delivering AAA/internship in AAI/guided role play sessions with a course teacher/other participants)
- Minimum 25 hours self-learning (e.g. reading course materials, literature, watching videos, attending conferences and workshops)

Assessment

- An exam or ongoing course assessment by the teacher is required, leading to a certificate which states the number of hours' training that has been completed and any (relevant) qualification achieved (for human-dog teams: both handlers of the animals and the animals need to pass a test together)

In case of courses where the focus is on humans working with dogs to deliver AAA, the dogs that will be involved in delivering AAT should attend together with their owner. In general, IAHAIO states that training and testing the team (the human together with the animal) is central and should be preferred over evaluating just the animal. It is the human in the human-dog team's responsibility to assess the welfare of the animal and if the situation/environment is suitable. The human in the human-dog team therefore needs as much training as possible.

Outcome/qualification

On completion of the training, volunteers are permitted to deliver AAA (or together with professionals be involved in AAT/AAE/AAC).

c) Training in professionally-led AAT/AAE/AAC

This is aimed at already-qualified professionals in the fields of therapy, coaching, education or medicine wanting to deliver AAT/AAE or AAC. It applies to professionals working with a range of recommended species, as outlined in the [IAHAIO White Paper](#).

All professionals involved in the delivery of AAT/AAE/AAC should complete a course/training with the following requirements:

Content

- Mandatory topics are:
 - Principles of the human-animal relationship (including theoretical models and ethics)
 - Principles of AAI (including theoretical models, methods, law, hygiene and risk management, suitability and selection of animals)
 - Keeping and training of animals
 - Basics in psychology, education, medicine
 - Ethology and veterinary medicine
 - If the course is species-specific, these topics need to address the involved species. If it is not species-specific, different species need to be addressed.

Teacher qualifications

- Teachers in educational programs for AAI professionals need specialist training and knowledge (e.g. a degree, certification, qualification) in the field that they teach. Some of the teachers should have practical experience in AAI.
- The programme director/manager needs to be a qualified AAI professional

Entry requirements

- Only people with a pre-existing specialist training and knowledge (e.g. a degree, certification, qualification) in education, coaching, therapy (including e.g. psychology and social work) or medicine are admitted to the course
- At program director's discretion, a maximum of 10% of a course cohort may be eligible with an equivalence through practical experience

Duration

The course should at least have 450 hours and include:

- Minimum of 170 hours seminars/lectures/structured course delivered by a teacher
- Minimum of 60 hours practice (e.g. accompanying a practitioner delivering AAA/internship in AAI/guided role play sessions with a course teacher/other participants)
- Maximum of 75 hours self-learning (e.g. reading course materials, literature, watching videos, attending conferences and workshops)
- Other hours free learning forms

Assessment

- A theoretical and practical exam is required, leading to a certificate in which the total number of learning hours is displayed.

Outcome/qualification

- Permitted to conduct AAI only in one's own professional field ("is qualified to involve animals in his/her own profession")

d) Continuing education

IAHAIO recommends that volunteers and professionals involved in different types of AAI undertake continuing education at least as follows:

- Volunteers: 8 hours every two years
- Professionals: 24 hours every two years

Examples of continued education activities include:

- Attendance of conferences, webinars, seminars
- Supervision or peer supervision
- Participation in courses/training
- Presenting/writing articles
- Extended courses in related fields

The topics of these education activities should be related to working with animals and/or the field of work