



# State of the Nation

**National Dog Survey 2025**

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# Welcome

Welcome to the Dogs Trust National Dog Survey 2025 report, our annual ‘state of the nation’ insight into the lives of dogs and the people who care for them.

Since 2021, Dogs Trust has run this large-scale, nationwide survey to better understand the needs, experiences, and priorities of dog owners across the UK. Collecting robust data is central to how we work.

By listening directly to those closest to dogs, we are building an evidence base to inform our decisions, shape our services, and guide how we support dogs and their owners.

Each year, hundreds of thousands of dog lovers voluntarily take part in our survey, making it the largest survey of its kind in the UK. The immense resulting dataset provides valuable insight into how dog ownership is changing, and highlights emerging trends in acquisition, care, behaviour, and daily life.

In 2025, over 320,000 dog owners told us about more than 420,000 dogs, and 22,000 people without dogs told us what dogs mean to them.

Their experiences and perspectives sit at the heart of this report. The findings highlight the strength of the human-dog bond, and reveal how recent social and economic changes, including the after-effects of the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis, are shaping the challenges faced by dogs and the people who care for them.

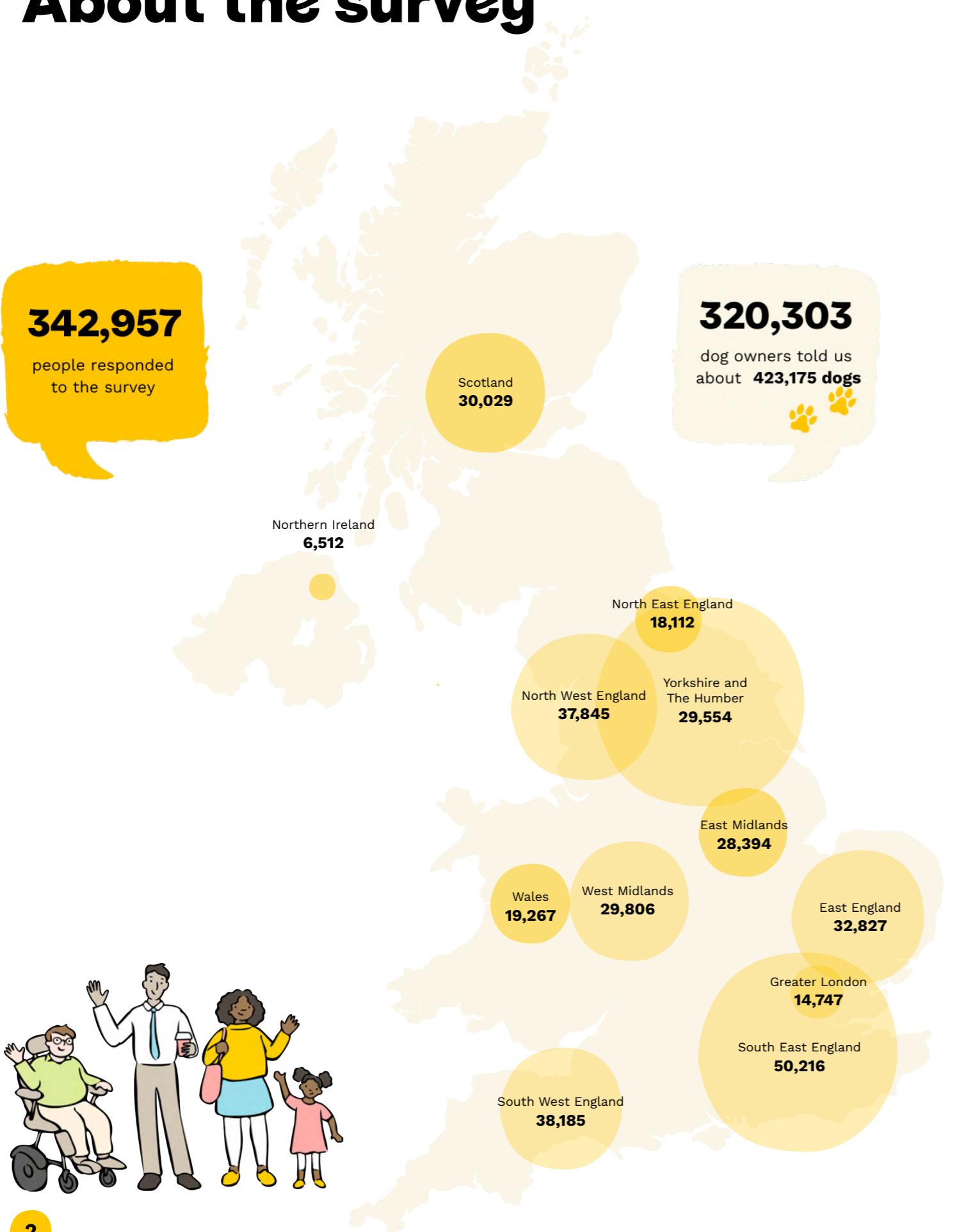
The National Dog Survey is one of the key ways we ensure owners’ voices are heard, and that a wide range of experiences are represented. Alongside our wider research and frontline experience, the insights in this report help us determine where early support, education, and intervention are needed most, so that dogs can remain safe, happy, and with the people who love them wherever possible.

This evidence-led approach underpins our mission to help dogs when they need us most. We do everything we can to keep dogs safe and happy with their owners; but when that’s not possible, we give them the best care until we find them a new forever home.

**Prof Rob Christley**  
BVSc(Hons), DipVCS, MVCS, DipECVPH, PhD  
Dogs Trust Head of Research



# About the survey



## Data collection

The National Dog Survey 2025 was conducted online between 6<sup>th</sup> May and 27<sup>th</sup> June 2025. The survey was hosted at <https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/national-dog-survey/take-part> and was open to people living in the UK aged 18 years and over.

Participants were directed to different sets of questions depending on whether or not they currently owned a dog. Dog owners were asked about the dogs they lived with, including dog age, sex, neuter status, and breed or type, how they got their dog, their dogs' traits, health, and behaviour. Where applicable, owners could answer these questions for more than one dog. Owners were also asked about their everyday life with their dogs, attitudes towards dog training, dogs in society, and the perceived benefits of dog ownership, as well as their relationship with their dog or dogs.

Participants without a dog were asked whether they were considering getting a dog in the future, and their reasons for or against doing so. Participants who either owned a dog or were considering getting one were asked about the factors they felt were important when choosing a dog.

At the end of the survey, participants were invited to provide demographic information to help us better understand who took part. All questions were optional, except for the initial question on dog ownership, which determined the subsequent question pathway. Most questions were multiple choice, with some opportunities for free-text responses. The survey took approximately 20 minutes to complete on average, when providing information about one dog.

## Why do we ask for respondent demographics?

We collect data on age, gender, ethnicity, education level, housing tenure, and household composition to understand who is taking part in the survey. This helps ensure that our knowledge reflects a diverse range of experiences and perspectives. Learning more about dog owners helps us tailor our services and resources to meet the differing needs of dog owners across the UK.

## Inclusion criteria

To take part, participants had to be aged 18 years or over and living in the United Kingdom. Participation was entirely voluntary.

## Recruitment

Participants were recruited through a combination of direct and open routes. Individuals who completed the 2024 survey and consented to being contacted again were invited by email on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2025. The survey was also promoted on social media platforms, including through paid Facebook advertisements, between 13<sup>th</sup> May and 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2025. As a result, the survey uses a voluntary, convenience sample rather than a nationally representative sample.

## Data analysis and presentation

For each survey question, descriptive statistics were calculated, including frequencies and percentages.<sup>1</sup> As all questions were optional, percentages presented throughout the report are based on the number of available responses for each question. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number, with values of 0.5% rounded up. When percentages do not total 100%, this is due to rounding or multi-select questions.

Breed prevalence was calculated as the proportion of all dogs reported in the survey. As the data were collected at a single point in time (cross-sectional survey), dog age was used as a proxy for time when examining changes in breed popularity (e.g. 5-year-old dogs represent dogs born 5 years ago). A breed's popularity at different time points was inferred from the proportion of dogs of that breed within different age cohorts.

Where we hypothesised that multiple factors may be associated with an outcome, we used statistical modelling approaches to better understand the contribution of these factors.

Free-text responses were analysed using a thematic approach. Frequently occurring words and phrases were identified, and samples of responses were reviewed to explore recurring topics. Responses were then grouped into themes. All direct quotes included in the report were anonymised, with identifying details removed.

All data management and analyses were conducted using the statistical programming language R.<sup>2</sup>

## Ethical review

The study was approved by an independent research ethics committee (reference: ERB077).

<sup>1</sup> Detailed survey methodology: Anderson et al. (2023) National Dog Survey: Describing UK Dog and Ownership Demographics. *Animals*, 13, 1072. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani13061072>

<sup>2</sup> R Core Team (2025). R: A Language and Environment for Statistical Computing. R Foundation for Statistical Computing, Vienna, Austria. <https://www.R-project.org/>

## Sample characteristics

The findings in this report are based on responses from 342,957 participants, 320,303 of whom were dog owners who provided information about 423,175 dogs, and 22,654 people without a dog who shared their thoughts on dogs in the UK.

Responses were received from participants across all four nations of the UK. Most respondents lived in England (83%), with smaller proportions from Scotland (9%), Wales (6%), and Northern Ireland (2%), broadly reflecting the UK population distribution.

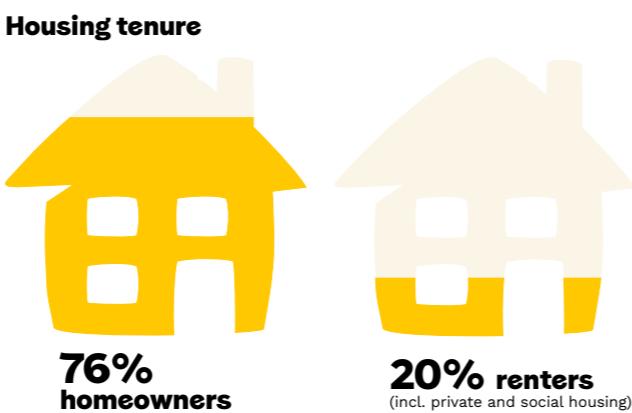
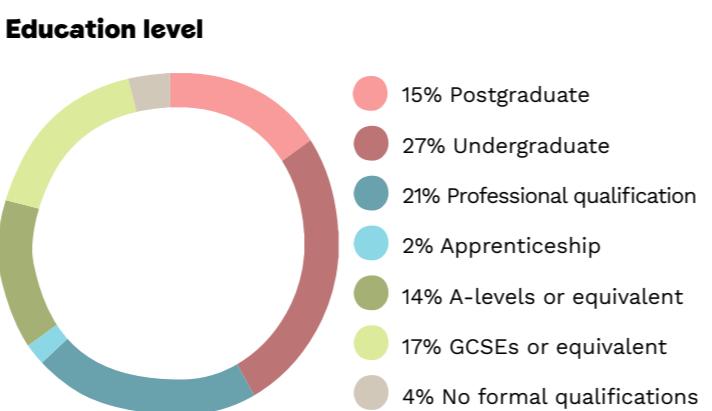
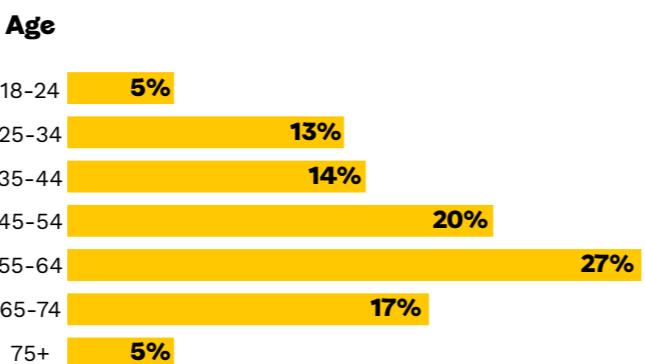
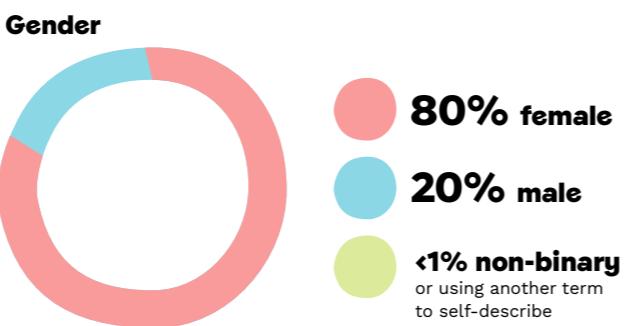
Most respondents were aged between 45 and 74 years (64%), and the majority identified as female (80%). The vast majority of respondents identified as White British (94%).

Most households represented in the survey consisted of two adults, and 19% included children. The sample was relatively highly educated when compared with government statistics (ONS Census 2021), with an undergraduate degree being the most commonly reported highest level of education (27%), and fewer than 4% reporting no formal qualifications. Most respondents were homeowners (76%), while 20% reported renting their home.

### Interpreting the data

The National Dog Survey uses a voluntary, convenience sample which is not necessarily nationally representative. Some groups are over-represented, including women, homeowners, and people with higher levels of education, which is typical of voluntary survey research. Other groups, such as renters and people from minority ethnic backgrounds, may be under-represented, though comprehensive data on dog ownership rates across different demographics are lacking.

The large scale of the survey nonetheless provides valuable insight into patterns and trends in dog ownership, and these results should be interpreted with this context in mind.



# Key findings

## Dogs are family

### The emotional importance of dogs in people's lives

Dogs play a central role in wellbeing, identity, and companionship.



**94%**

Dogs should be treated as members of the family

**80%**

My dog is my best friend

**95%**

Having a dog is good for my mental health

**76%**

Having a dog makes me feel less isolated

**73%**

Dog ownership is a key part of my identity

**48%**

My happiness depends on my dog

## Where dogs come from

### Acquisition routes and lasting pandemic effects

How people find dogs has shifted, with implications for welfare and support needs.



**51%**

Dogs came from breeders

**19%**

Dogs came from a rehoming organisation

**30%**

Owners found their dog via a selling site or app

**22%**

Owners first heard about their dog through family or friends

During COVID-19

**37% more dogs**

acquired from breeders than expected



Since the pandemic

**28% more dogs**

acquired via direct rehoming from previous owners

## Commitment

### Everyday care, health, and cost

Caring for a dog requires consistent time, preventative care, and access to services.

On average, owners spend  
**2h 12m per day**

on dog care tasks



**67m/day**

Spent on dog walks

**85%**

of owners trust their vet

**66%**

of owners have pet insurance

**71%**

of dogs are neutered

**96%**

of dogs had been vaccinated

**Only 36%**

have attended training classes

## Expectations and behaviour

### Living together in a busy society

Modern expectations of dogs are high, behaviour challenges are common, and the management of dogs affects everyone who shares public spaces.

**90%**

Dogs experienced at least one behaviour issue last year



**4 in 10** owners worry about the behaviour of other people's dogs

**53%** of owners comfortable letting their dog off lead

**18%** let dogs off lead despite unreliable recall

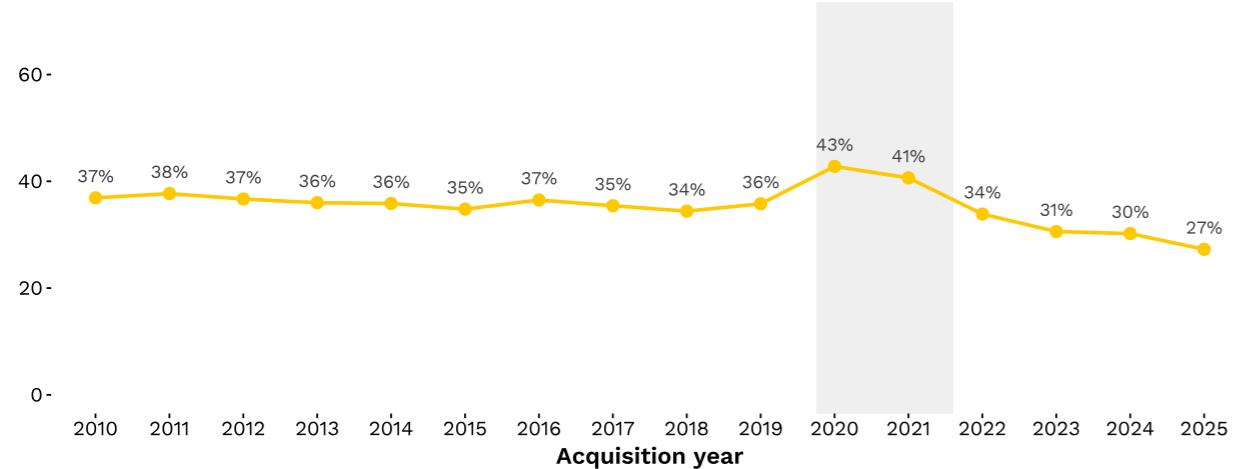
**15%** do not let their dog off lead but wish they could

# Dog population and demographics

## Dog demographic trends

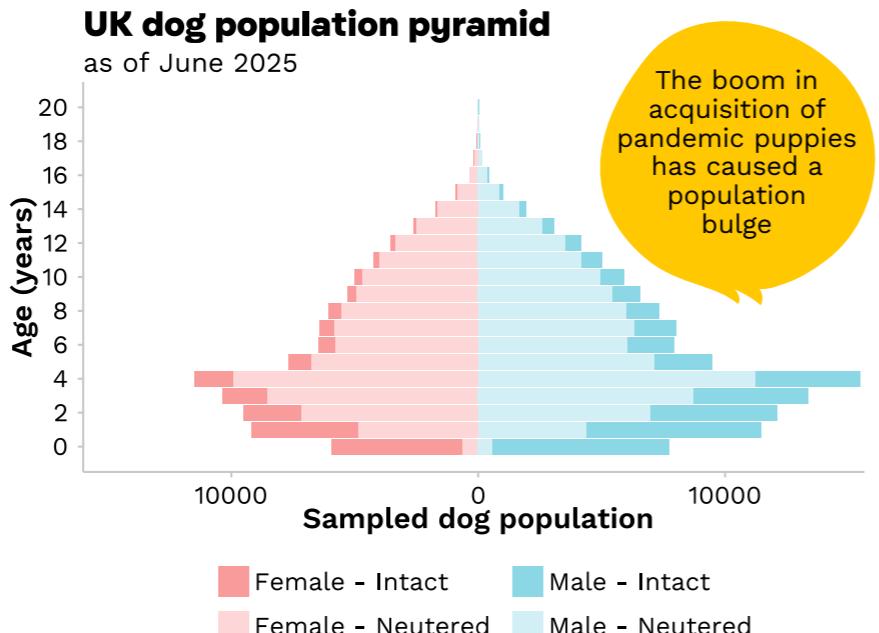
Since 2021, we have been tracking the age distribution of dogs taking part in the National Dog Survey. Over this period, the data clearly show the lasting impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the UK dog population, as the large cohort of 'pandemic puppies' acquired during this time continues to age.

### First time dog ownership



In more recent years, the proportion of first-time dog owners acquiring a dog has fallen below pre-pandemic levels to only 27% for dogs acquired in the first half of 2025. This likely reflects the fact that many people brought forward their decision to get a dog during the pandemic, reducing the pool of potential first-time owners in the years immediately following. Through future National Dog Surveys, we'll continue to track whether first-time ownership returns to pre-pandemic levels with time.

As shown in the dog population pyramid, the unusually large cohort of puppies acquired during the pandemic is now moving through adolescence into young adulthood. This demographic shift has important implications. Early-life experiences play a critical role in shaping behaviour, and lockdown restrictions meant that many pandemic puppies missed out on typical socialisation opportunities, including exposure to unfamiliar people, dogs, and environments.<sup>3</sup>



<sup>3</sup> Brand et al. (2024) Impacts of puppy early life experiences, puppy-purchasing practices, and owner characteristics on owner-reported problem behaviours in a UK pandemic puppies cohort at 21 months of age. *Animals*, 14, 336. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani14020336>

Kinsman et al. (2024) Puppy socialisation experiences in relation to age and COVID-19 lockdown restrictions in the UK and ROI. *Animals*, 14, 1471.

<https://doi.org/10.3390/ani14101471>

These young adult dogs, often living with first-time owners, are increasingly presenting challenges that owners may feel less prepared to manage. At Dogs Trust, this is reflected in growing demand for help and advice, including increased use of our free-to-access **Behaviour Support Line**. We also hear from tens of thousands of owners seeking to rehome their dogs each year, highlighting the importance of early, accessible support to help keep dogs and owners together wherever possible.

Understanding these demographic trends allows us to anticipate pressures on dog owners and services, so that we can adapt our support accordingly.

## Breed trends

As well as keeping track of the age of dogs, the National Dog Survey allows us to monitor changes in the nation's most common dog breeds and types.<sup>4</sup> We welcome all breeds, types, mixes, and sizes of dogs in the survey, providing insight into how breed preferences are evolving over time.

### Labrador Retrievers remain the most populous breed in the UK

Coming as no surprise, Labrador Retrievers keep their place as the nation's most common specific breed, making up around 8% of all dogs in the UK. They have held this position every year the survey has been carried out.

### Changing popularity among new puppies

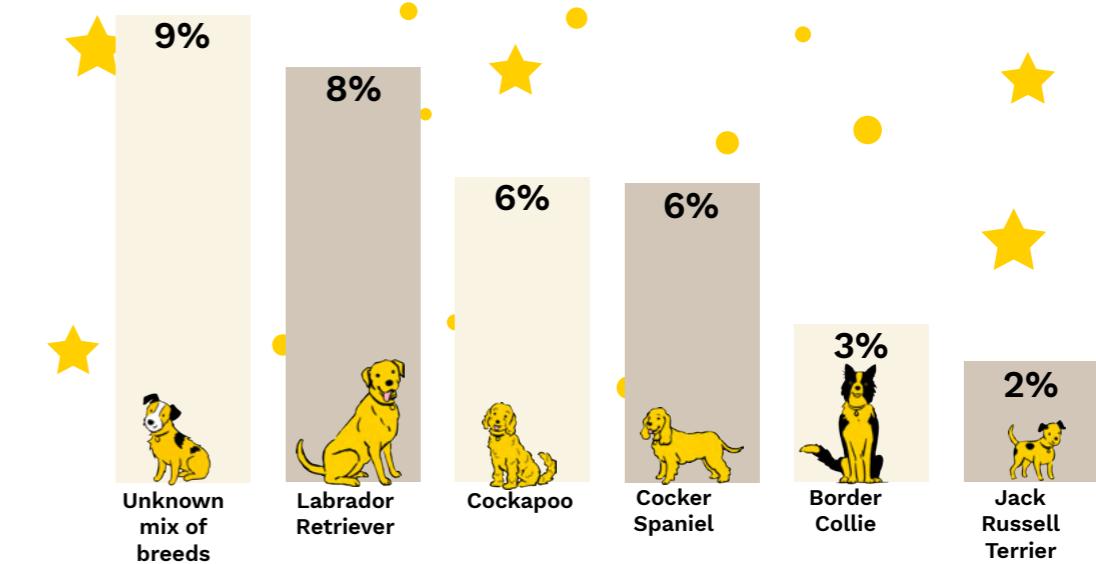
To assess breed popularity, we compared dogs of different ages in our survey.<sup>5</sup> Younger dogs represent more recent birth years, while older dogs represent earlier years. When looking back across the age groups, we noticed some changes in current trends. Miniature Smooth-haired Dachshunds have entered the top ten most common breeds amongst under one-year-olds, indicating a rise in recent popularity. However, they still account for only 2.5% of puppies born in the past year, compared with 9% for Labrador puppies.

In contrast, French Bulldogs, which currently rank tenth overall in the dog population, appear to be declining in popularity among newly acquired puppies, once sixth (2.3%) at their peak and now ranking 17<sup>th</sup> (1.2%). While their popularity grew steadily in previous years, the age distribution now suggests fewer are being born compared with four to five years ago, during the peak of the pandemic puppy boom. Pugs show a similar decline, possibly reflecting growing awareness of the health and welfare issues associated with brachycephalic (flat-faced) breeds.

### Crossbreeds continue to make up a large share of the UK dog population

Crossbreeds accounted for 42% of dogs in our survey, showing their continued appeal to owners. Unknown mixes - that is, dogs of unknown parentage - form the largest group, making up 9% of dogs in the survey, overall. Among identifiable crosses, Cockapoos (Cocker Spaniel x Poodle), Cavapoos (Cavalier King Charles Spaniel x Poodle), Labradoodles (Labrador Retriever x Poodle), and Lurchers (a sighthound such as a Greyhound, Whippet or Saluki crossed with another breed of dog) are the four most common types.

## Top 6 breeds



<sup>4</sup> Which of these best describes your dog? Please select one. A single breed (e.g. Labrador Retriever, Whippet). A crossbreed or mix of known breeds (e.g. Cockapoo, Border Collie x Labrador Retriever, Lurcher). An unknown mix of breeds.

<sup>5</sup> How old is your dog? (n = 343,992)

Poodle-crosses continue to be very popular, and several, including the Cavapoo, are continuing to grow in popularity (measured as a proportion of both recently born and recently acquired dogs).

**42%** of dogs in our survey were crossbreeds

#### Emerging breeds to monitor

A number of other breeds and crossbreeds are rapidly becoming more common, although they have not yet entered the national top 20, with each making up <1% of all dogs. These include the Maltipoo (Maltese x Poodle), Bernedoodle (Bernese Mountain Dog x Poodle), Italian Greyhound, Corgi, Shiba Inu, Belgian Malinois, Pocket Bully (a smaller variant of the American Bully), and the Cane Corso (Italian Mastiff). Tracking these emerging trends helps build an early picture of how breed preferences are shifting, and how the profile of dogs living in UK households may continue to change.

Some of these patterns may warrant closer monitoring. Growing interest in high-drive working breeds, such as the Belgian Malinois, and large, powerful mastiff-type dogs, such as the Cane Corso may be influenced by social trends, media exposure, and perceptions of status. Where ownership is driven primarily by appearance or image, there is an increased risk of mismatches

between owner expectations and a dog's physical, behavioural, and welfare needs. Without appropriate understanding, training, and support, this can have implications not only for individual dog welfare, but also for public confidence, safety, and longer-term pressures on support and rehoming services.

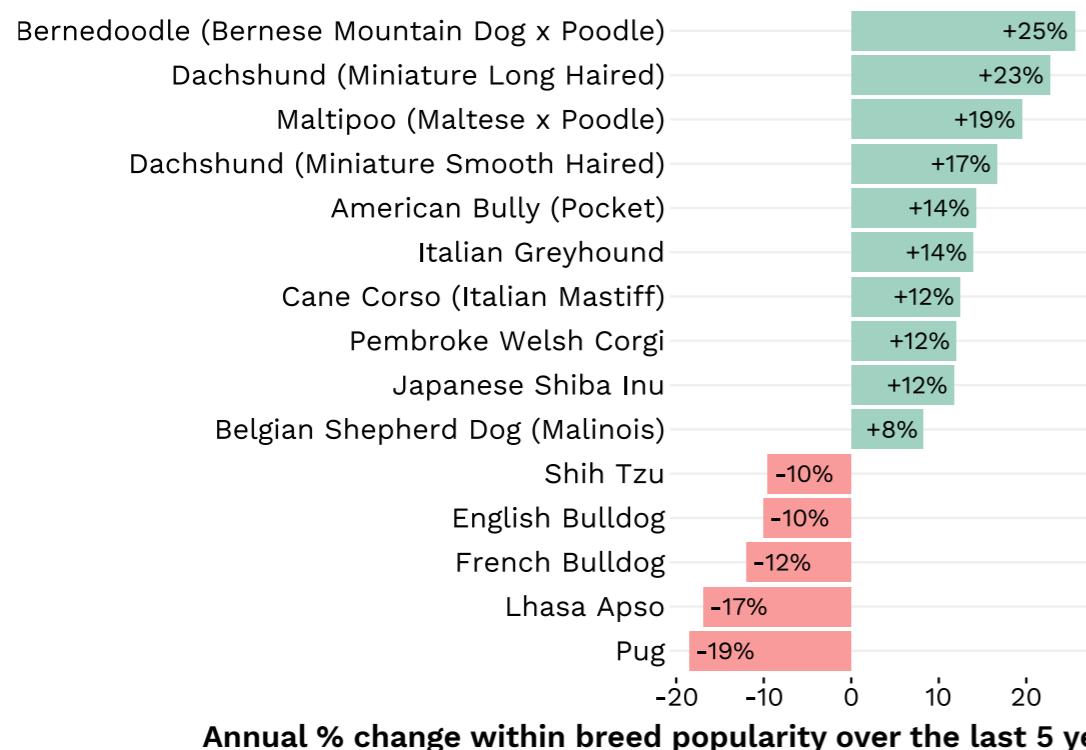
Continued monitoring of these patterns is therefore important to help anticipate emerging risks to dog welfare, inform education and early intervention, and support responsible ownership as trends in breed popularity evolve.

#### How we analysed breed popularity

For each age group, we counted how many dogs belonged to each breed and compared this to the total number of dogs in that age group. We then used a statistical model that estimates how the chance of a dog being a particular breed has changed from older to more recent birth years, while allowing each breed to have its own trend over time.

This approach accounts for differences in sample size between age groups and makes it possible to identify which breeds are rising or falling in popularity most quickly.

#### Annual change within breed popularity



# Acquisition

## Where do people get their dogs?

This year's survey provides insight into where people in the UK get their dogs, including where owners first saw their dog advertised or heard about their dog.<sup>6</sup> The findings highlight the wide range of routes by which dogs come to live with their owners.

Just over half of dogs in the survey (51%) were acquired from breeders. Of these, almost all (around 99%) came from breeders based in the UK, with a small proportion (1.3%) acquired from breeders located outside the UK. Among dogs acquired from UK breeders, 48% of owners reported checking that the breeder was licensed, while just over half (52%) did not know whether the breeder held a licence or not. Owners who acquired their dog from a licensed breeder were more likely to have found their dog through the Kennel Club breeder or Find a Puppy webpages. In contrast, owners who acquired a dog from a breeder but did not check their licensing status were more likely to have found their dog via a selling website or app.

Almost one in five dogs (19%) were acquired from a rehoming organisation. Of these, 80% were rehomed within the UK, and 20% were rehomed from overseas. Among dogs rehomed from organisations within the UK, nearly a quarter (23%) came from Dogs Trust, representing around 3.5% of all dogs in the survey. UK-based rehoming can be further divided into dogs adopted from a rehoming or adoption centre (82%), and those rehomed through UK organisations without a physical rehoming centre (18%).

Other routes of acquisition included from a friend or family member (13%), rehoming directly from a previous owner (8%), and buying from someone who did not breed them (< 5%), including purchases made from an individual seller, online, or through a pet shop.

Almost one in five dogs (19%) were acquired from a rehoming organisation.

## How owners found their dogs – Dog advertising

Three in ten dog owners (30%) first found their dog advertised on a pet or general selling website or app. These sources included breeders, third-party sellers who did not breed the dog, and owners looking to rehome their dog.

Just over one in five owners (22%) first found out about their dog through family or friends. One in ten owners (10%) first saw or heard about their dog through visiting a UK-based rehoming centre, including Dogs Trust. A further 10% used the Kennel Club website, and 6% found their dog via a social media platform.

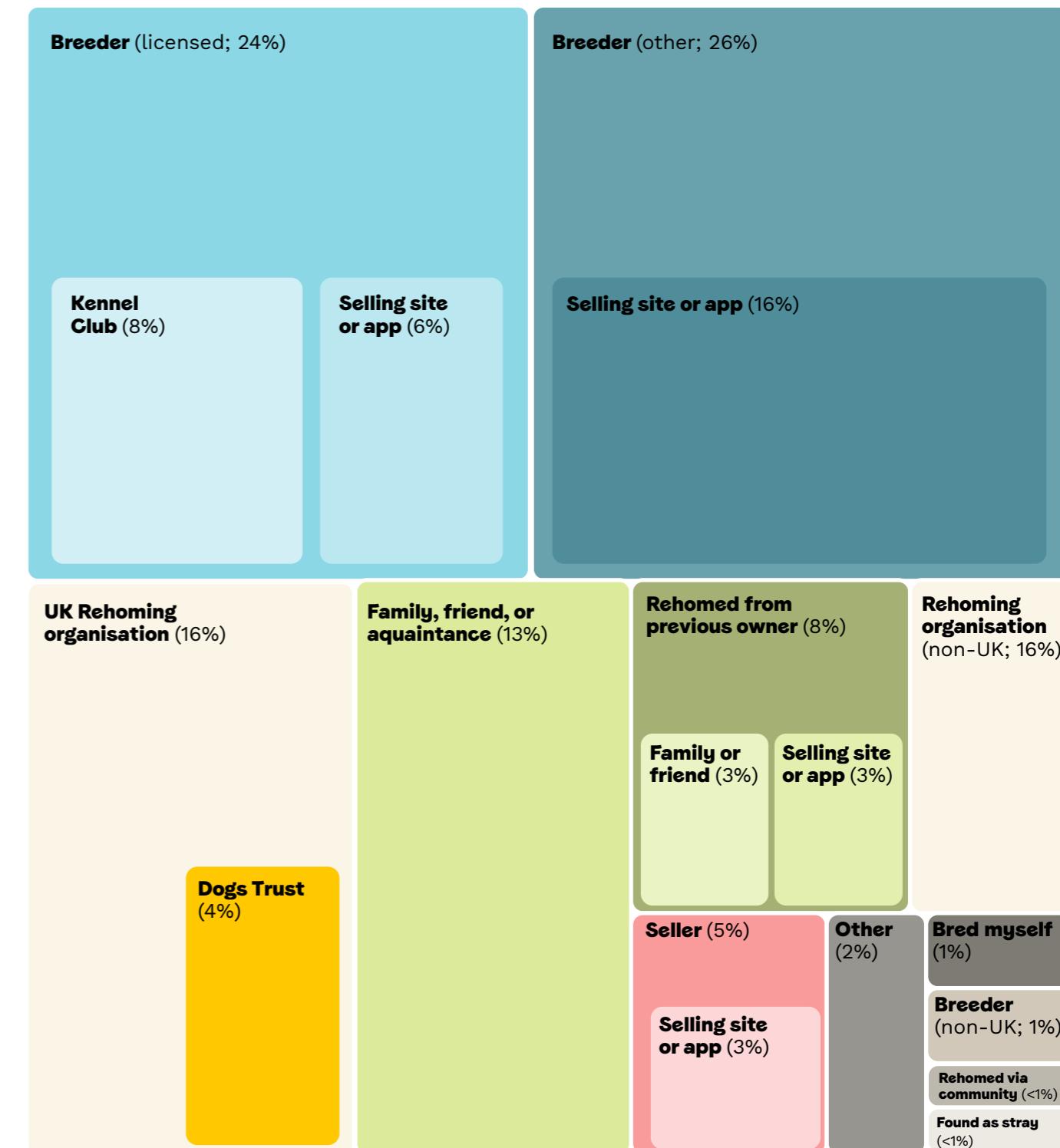
Dogs rehomed directly from a previous owner were most commonly found through family or friends, online selling sites and apps, or social media.

Just over one in five owners (22%) first found out about their dog through family or friends.



## How owners found their dogs by acquisition source

The route through which owners first heard about their dog relates to where the dog ultimately came from. Each large block represents an acquisition source, such as a breeder or rehoming organisation, with inlaid blocks showing how owners first heard about or located their dog. The size of each block reflects the number of dogs in the survey.



<sup>6</sup> Where did you get your dog from? (n = 341,861)

Where did you first see or hear about your dog? Please choose the option that best applies. (n = 334,565)

## The impact of the pandemic on how people got their dogs

To understand how the COVID-19 pandemic affected dog acquisition, we compared what actually happened with what we would have expected if pre-pandemic trends had continued. Using survey data from dogs acquired before 2020, we built a predictive model for each acquisition route, estimating how many dogs would typically be acquired over time if the pandemic had never happened.<sup>7</sup> We then compared these expected patterns with data from dogs acquired during and since the pandemic, allowing us to identify where, when, and by how much acquisition trends changed.

During 2020–2022, acquisitions from UK breeders increased beyond what would have been expected based on pre-pandemic trends. This rise was seen for both licensed breeders and breeders whose licence status was not checked, but the increase was notably greater for the latter. This suggests that, during periods of lockdown and home working, demand for puppies outstripped the supply available from licensed breeders, leading some prospective owners to look elsewhere. Since then, acquisitions from breeders have largely returned to levels in line with pre-pandemic expectations.

The pandemic period also saw increases in more informal routes of acquisition. Dogs acquired from family, friends, and acquaintances rose during 2020–2022 and, while these levels have fallen since, they remain higher than before the pandemic. Similarly, rehoming directly from a previous owner without the involvement of a rehoming organisation has increased since the pandemic. Together, these patterns may indicate a shift towards informal rehoming as owners' circumstances changed following the easing of restrictions and as pandemic-acquired puppies matured.

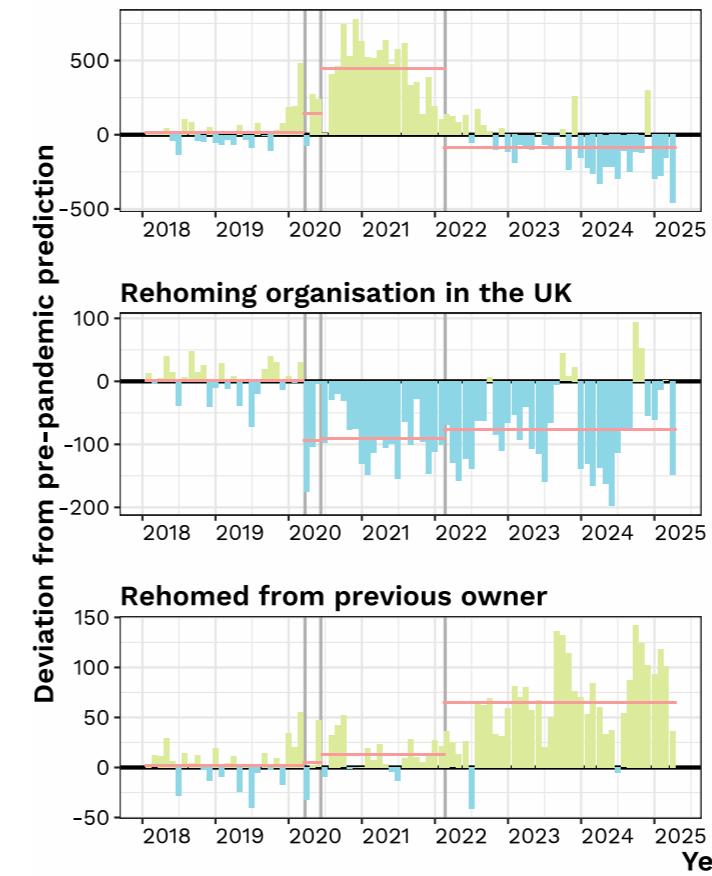


Other acquisition routes show different patterns. Acquisitions from sellers who did not breed the dog, and from breeders based outside the UK, were higher than expected during the pandemic but have since fallen below pre-pandemic levels. Rehoming from UK-based organisations showed lower-than-expected levels during periods of strict lockdown, likely reflecting temporary closures and reduced capacity. While there is some evidence of recovery among certain organisations, the overall picture is one of continued lower-than-expected acquisitions. This highlights the ongoing pressures faced by the rehoming sector, with implications for kennel capacity and the length of time dogs spend waiting to find new homes.

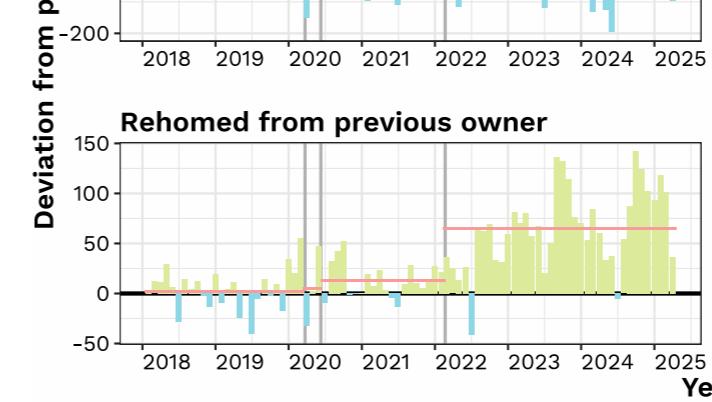
Overall, these findings illustrate how the pandemic reshaped dog acquisition in the UK, temporarily accelerating demand for puppies. The aftermath is becoming evident, with increases in dogs being rehomed directly from previous owners, often through family and friends. Understanding these changes provides important context for the growing demand on support services and the number of handover requests received by Dogs Trust.

## Acquisition trends: prediction vs reality

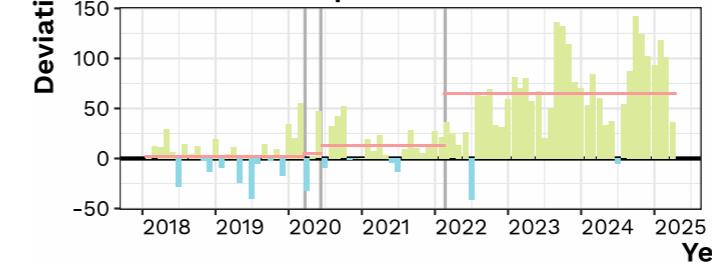
### Breeder in the UK



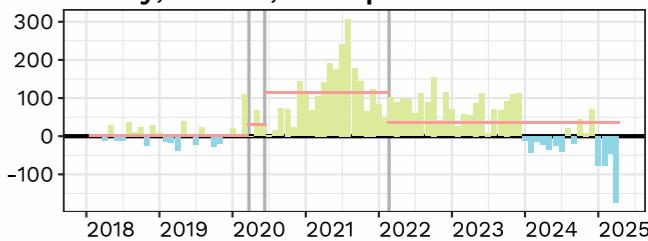
### Rehoming organisation in the UK



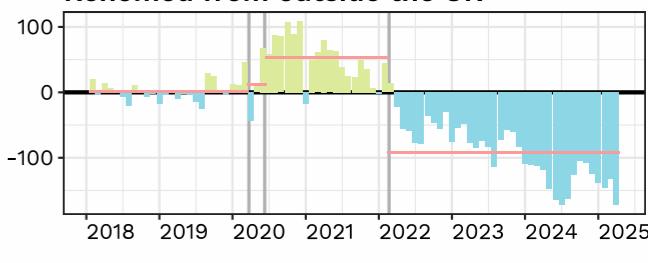
### Rehomed from previous owner



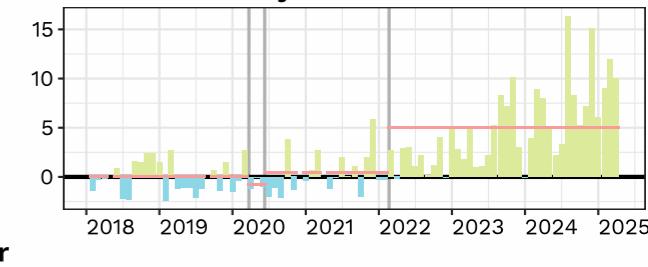
### Family, friends, or acquaintances



### Rehomed from outside the UK



### Found as a stray



### How to read the acquisition trend graphs

To understand how the pandemic affected dog acquisition, we compared what actually happened with what we would have expected if pre-2020 trends had continued.

Each graph shows the difference between the observed number of dogs acquired and the expected number based on pre-pandemic patterns.



- Green bars above zero indicate more dogs acquired than expected, while blue bars below zero indicate fewer dogs than expected.
- The black horizontal line represents the expected baseline.
- Grey vertical lines mark key periods of COVID-19 restrictions.
- The red line marker shows the average difference within each time period.

These graphs help show not just whether acquisition patterns changed, but when those changes occurred and which sources were most affected.

Rehoming directly from a previous owner without the involvement of an organisation has increased since the pandemic.

<sup>7</sup> Where did you get your dog from? When did you get your dog? Please select the month and year. (n = 336,644)

## Preparing for bringing a dog home

Responsible dog ownership begins before a dog is brought home. Understanding a dog's needs, the realities of care, and what to look for or ask when acquiring a dog can help owners make informed choices and avoid inadvertently supporting poor welfare practices.

The type and amount of research people carried out before getting a dog varied widely.<sup>8</sup> Around half of owners (49%) reported searching the internet, and 17% said that they found advice on social media before bringing their dog home. Fewer owners reported seeking advice from animal welfare organisations (6%). While online resources are readily available, the quality and reliability of information varies, highlighting the importance of clear, evidence-based guidance that is easy to find and understand.

Around three out of ten owners researched different dog breeds (29%), while a similar proportion (30%) said they already had experience of their dog's breed. Only a third of owners researched exercise needs (33%), and 29% researched training methods. Just 27% researched the cost of buying or adopting a dog, and even fewer owners considered longer-term costs in advance, with just 22% looking into the cost of vet bills. These findings suggest that some key aspects of dog ownership are not always fully considered before acquisition.

Pre-acquisition research differed considerably between prospective puppy owners and those acquiring dogs through rehoming routes. Among people getting a puppy, most, but not all reported

seeing their puppy with their mother (70%) and littermates (64%) before the day they brought them home, while 58% saw their puppy in person in advance and 29% saw the puppy with their father. As expected, these checks occurred far less often among people rehoming adult dogs, when seeing parents or littermates is often not possible. However, prospective puppy owners, especially those who acquired their puppy from a licensed breeder, were also more likely to carry out other forms of preparation, such as asking about health checks or screening, vaccination and worming schedules, whether the puppy was already microchipped, and researching training methods and exercise needs.

Among those who acquired dogs from rescue or rehoming organisations, 30% reported asking for advice from a rehoming centre, and 13% searched for advice from an animal welfare organisation. These sources of advice were used far less often by people acquiring dogs through breeders or informal routes, where owners were more likely to rely on online information, prior experience, or advice from friends and family.

Experience also shaped preparation. First-time dog owners were more likely to report doing research before getting their dog than those who had already owned a dog during adulthood, suggesting that familiarity may reduce perceived need for preparation.

These findings highlight considerable variation in whether **recommended checks** and research are carried out before bringing a dog home. Supporting prospective owners to understand what responsible pre-acquisition checks look like, and why they matter, remains an important opportunity to improve welfare outcomes and reduce problems later in a dog's life.

## Responsible Dog Acquisition & Policy

### Breeding & Selling:

As of the 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2025, as part of their new Animal Welfare Strategy, the Government says they will consult on a new registration system for all dog breeders to improve traceability and tackle puppy farming. A robust, transparent system is needed to ensure every dog can be traced back to its breeder.

### Puppy Smuggling:

New powers under the Animal Welfare (Imports of Dogs, Cats and Ferrets) Act aim to ban imports of underage, pregnant, or mutilated dogs. Secondary legislation is now needed to implement these protections without delay.

### Rehoming Regulation:

The Government will consult on licensing domestic rehoming organisations, but international rehoming also lacks regulation. Any regulatory system must also cover overseas rehoming to mitigate disease and behavioural risks.

<sup>8</sup> What research did you do before you brought your dog home? (n = 317,914)

## What research did you do before you brought your dog home?

### Prospective puppy owners



**58%**  
saw their puppy in person before the day they brought them home

**64%**  
saw their puppy with their littermates

**70%**  
saw their puppy with their mum

**29%**  
saw their puppy with their dad

### All owners



**49%**  
did an internet search

**17%**  
found advice on social media

**29%**  
researched training methods

**33%**  
researched exercise needs

**29%**  
researched different dog breeds

**30%**  
said they already had experience of the breed



# Understanding dogs

## Expectations

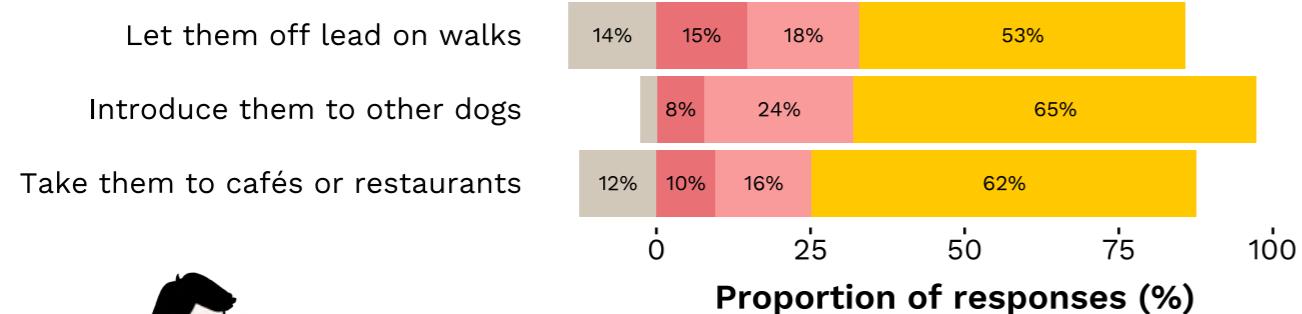
Understanding dogs means recognising that their needs, experiences, and ways of coping with the world are different from our own. At Dogs Trust, finding the right match between dogs and families is central to helping dogs thrive in their new homes. To explore this, in this year's survey, we asked dog owners what they hoped they would be able to do with their dogs, and what they were actually able to do comfortably in everyday life.<sup>9</sup>

The findings suggest that, for some owners, expectations do not always align with reality. For several common activities there were notable gaps between what owners hoped to do and what they felt able to do with their dog. For example, 18% of owners reported letting their dog off lead on walks despite their dog not always coming back when called, while a further 15% did not let their dog off lead but wished they could. Similarly,

24% of owners said they introduce their dog to other dogs but find it a struggle, and 8% said they do not do this but would like to. Taking dogs to cafés and restaurants showed a comparable pattern, with 16% doing so but finding it difficult, and 10% not doing so but wishing they could.

Expectations around dogs fitting seamlessly into human environments were also reflected among people who do not currently own a dog. When asked about the importance of different characteristics when choosing a dog,<sup>10</sup> 96% of non-owners said it was at least somewhat important that a dog be unfazed and well-behaved enough to accompany them in busy public places, such as shops, cafés, and public transport (20% slightly, 41% moderately, 35% very important).

## Can owners do what they hoped with their dogs?



- Yes, I can comfortably do this with my dog
- Yes, but it's a struggle / my dog is not that keen on this
- No, but I wish I could do this with my dog
- No, but I don't want to do this / not applicable to me

<sup>9</sup> We asked "Which of these can you currently do with your dog? Please choose the option that best applies for each activity. Yes, I can comfortably do this with my dog. Yes, but it's a struggle / my dog is not that keen on this. No, but I wish I could do this with my dog. No, but I don't want to do this / not applicable to me." (n = 320,147)

<sup>10</sup> How important to you are the following characteristics when choosing a dog? Please select the level of importance for each characteristic. (n = 14,486)

These findings underline the importance of considering a dog's needs alongside our own, and recognising that many environments and activities are designed for people rather than dogs. While dogs can often learn to navigate human spaces, this usually requires time, training, and careful support. Thinking in advance about lifestyle, daily routines, and the kinds of experiences a dog is likely to find comfortable can help set more realistic expectations, and set both dogs and owners up for success.

## Dog behaviour and training

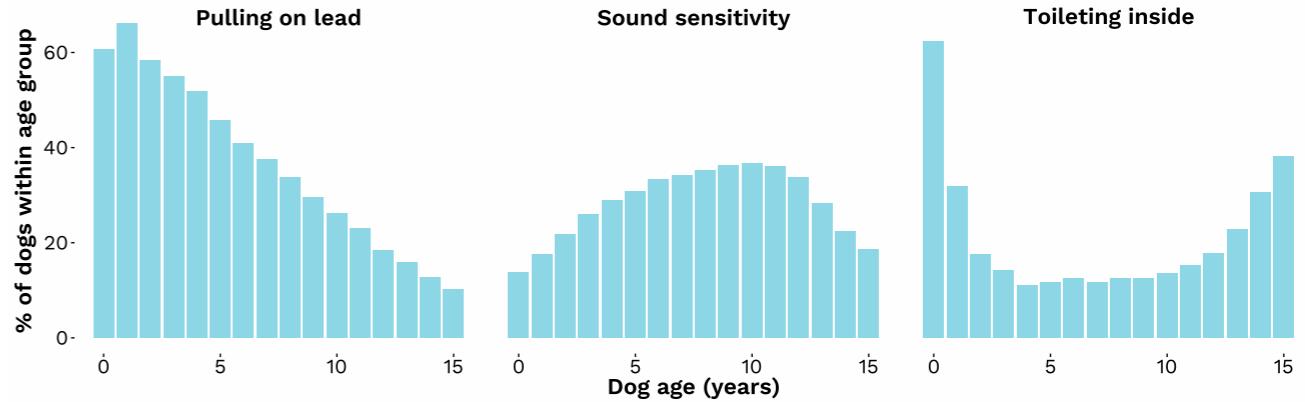
Dog owners were asked whether their dog had experienced any training or behaviour challenges in the last 12 months. Respondents could select all issues that applied.<sup>11</sup>

Behaviour challenges were common. Nine in ten dogs (90%) were reported to have experienced at least one of the listed training or behaviour issues in the year preceding the survey. The most frequently reported challenges were pulling on the lead (44%), jumping up at people (40%), and not coming back when called (35%).

**90%** of dogs had at least one behaviour issue

-  44% pulling on the lead
-  40% jumping up at people
-  35% not coming back when called

## Prevalence of dog behaviour issues by age



<sup>11</sup> Have you experienced any of these training or behaviour challenges with your dog in the last 12 months? Please select all that apply. (n = 341,119)

## Multiple behaviour challenges are common

Most dogs were reported to experience more than one behaviour issue. Over three-quarters of dogs (77%) were reported to have experienced two or more issues in the previous 12 months, and a third (33%) were reported to have experienced five or more. This highlights that behaviour challenges often co-occur, rather than appearing in isolation.

Some behaviours were also more likely to be reported together. For example, dogs that showed aggression-related behaviours towards other dogs were more likely to show similar behaviours towards people, and dogs showing fear or avoidance of other dogs were more likely to also show fear of people. These patterns reinforce the importance of considering behaviour holistically, rather than focusing on single issues in isolation.

## Behaviour issues in dogs of different ages

The prevalence of different behaviour challenges varied by dog age. Some issues were more common in younger dogs, including pulling on the lead, jumping up, unreliable recall, play-biting, and attention-seeking behaviours. These behaviours generally became less common among older dogs.

Other challenges appeared more frequently later in life. Growling, barking, and lunging at people and other dogs was most common after adolescence, while sound sensitivity was most prevalent among adult dogs aged 7 to 13 years, before declining in very old age. Certain behaviours, such as soiling in the house and waking at night, were most common during puppyhood and again in older age, which may reflect early developmental stages and age-related physical health or cognitive decline.

Older dogs were more likely than younger dogs to show none of the listed behaviour issues.

## Breed, acquisition, and owner factors associated with behaviour issues

Some behaviour challenges were more commonly reported in certain breeds or types, likely reflecting a combination of genetics, physiology, life experiences, and owner expectations.

For example, toileting difficulties were more frequently reported in small breeds,<sup>12</sup> while sound sensitivity was more common among collie and sheepdog types, and excessive barking was more commonly reported for dachshunds and dachshund crosses. However, as behaviour data were owner-reported, these findings may also reflect differences in how behaviour is perceived and labelled across breeds.

The number of behaviour issues reported also varied with owner and dog characteristics. Younger dogs, smaller dogs, and dogs acquired through online selling platforms, social media, or rehoming routes were more likely to be reported as having multiple behaviour challenges. Behaviour issues were also more commonly reported by younger owners and by people owning a dog for the first time.

It is important to note that these associations do not indicate cause and effect. The higher number of issues reported by younger owners may reflect a range of factors, including differences in experience, lifestyle, expectations, or awareness of dog behaviour. Younger owners may also be more likely to recognise and report behaviour challenges, rather than behaviour issues being inherently more common in their dogs.

Together, these findings show that behaviour challenges are a common part of life with many dogs, particularly during early development and periods of change. Understanding how behaviour varies by age, background, and experiences can help set realistic expectations, support early intervention, and guide owners towards the right advice and support at the right time.

... these findings show that behaviour challenges are a common part of life with many dogs, particularly during early development and periods of change.

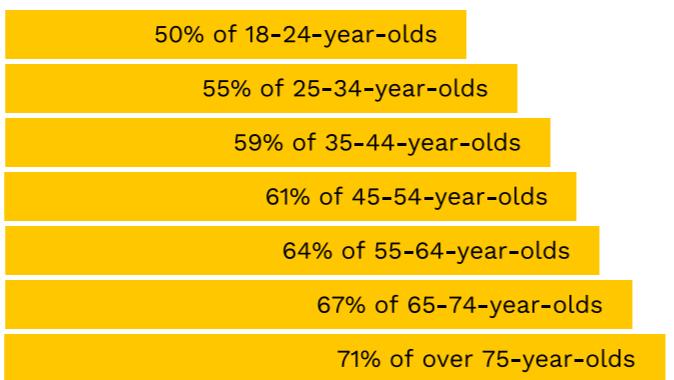
## Beliefs and opinions on dog training

Dog owners were asked to respond to a set of statements about dog behaviour and training.<sup>13</sup> The vast majority agreed that dogs should always be treated with kindness and compassion (98%) and that dogs should be trained without fear or force (95%). However, some beliefs indicative of outdated training approaches or misconceptions were still common: 70% agreed that dogs need to respect their owners, 62% thought dogs need to know who's boss, 46% believed dogs know right from wrong, and 36% thought a wagging tail always means a dog is happy.

Opinions often varied by owner age. Older owners were more likely to support traditional control-based ideas, such as dogs needing to know who's boss or knowing right from wrong, and were also more likely to expect dogs to fit around their lifestyle and tolerate human behaviour. They were slightly less likely than younger owners to value ongoing training and more likely to consider dog training as "common sense" rather than a skill requiring consistent learning.

In contrast, younger owners (particularly those aged 25–34) were more likely to adopt a learning-based, empathetic approach to training. They placed greater emphasis on understanding the dog's perspective and prioritising trust and communication over control. These differences suggest that age and generational beliefs may influence how people interpret dog behaviour and approach training, which may have implications for how training guidance and support are communicated to owners.

## Agreement with the statement 'Dogs need to know who's boss'



<sup>12</sup> In agreement with this study: Learn, A. et al. (2020) Preliminary assessment of differences in completeness of house-training between dogs based on size. *Journal of Veterinary Behavior* 35, 19–26. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jveb.2019.08.003>

<sup>13</sup> We asked "How much do you agree or disagree with these statements?" on a 5-point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. e.g. "Dogs need to know who's boss" (n = 41,384)

## Help-seeking for dog behaviour issues

Owners who reported at least one training or behaviour issue were asked where they sought advice or information (those reporting more than one were asked about one issue at random).<sup>14</sup> Across all behaviour issues, the most common response was that no advice or information had been sought. When owners did look for support, the most frequently used format was self-led online content, particularly dog training "how-to" videos on platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, or TikTok. Direct contact with training or behaviour professionals via phone, video call, or messaging was comparatively rare.

Patterns varied by owner demographics. Older owners and male owners were the least likely to seek help, while women aged 25–44 were the most proactive. Younger owners tended to favour digital resources such as videos, apps, websites and online forums, whereas older owners preferred in-person and telephone-based support. These findings highlight that many owners do not seek help at all, and when they do, preferences differ across a range of formats.

Across all behaviour issues, the most common response was that no advice or information had been sought.

## Dogs Trust offers free-to-access behaviour support to all dogs



<sup>14</sup> Have you used any of these services to help with this behaviour? Please select all that apply.

# Everyday life with a dog

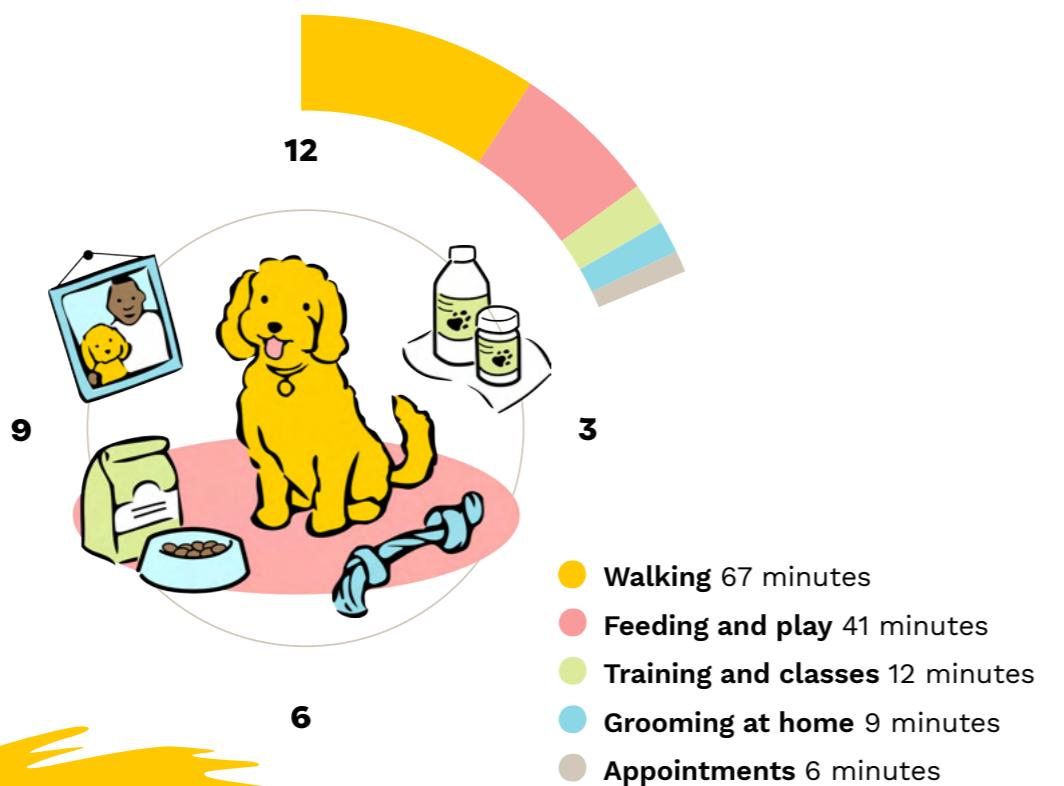
Dogs are a big part of the everyday lives of millions of people across the UK. This year's survey focused on the everyday joy of dogs, exploring how owners spend their time caring for, living with, and enjoying life alongside their dog. To understand what daily life with a dog looks like in the UK, we asked owners to think about the previous day and estimate how much time they spent on different dog-related activities, from walking and feeding to training, grooming, and appointments.<sup>15</sup>

## A daily commitment

For most owners, caring for a dog is a significant part of everyday life. On average, respondents spent 2 hours and 12 minutes per day on essential dog care activities such as walking, feeding, play, enrichment, training, and grooming. When time spent running errands with a dog in tow, such as school runs or trips to the shops, is included, this rose to 2 hours and 36 minutes per day.

Most owners spent between one and three hours on dog-related activities each day, although a small number reported spending much longer. A handful of respondents told us they had spent up to ten hours caring for or being out with their dog the previous day.

## Average time spent caring for a dog per day



Average daily time spent on dog care

**2 hours and 12 minutes**

<sup>15</sup> How much time did you spend yesterday doing these activities with your dog? Please estimate the time in minutes that you spent caring for your dog (including travel time).

## Where the time goes

Walking made up the largest share of daily dog care. On average, owners spent 67 minutes per day walking their dog, including everything from short comfort breaks to longer leisure walks. This was followed by feeding, play, and enrichment at home, which took an average of 41 minutes per day.

Dogs were also woven into everyday routines. On days when owners ran errands with their dog, such as trips to the shops or school runs, this typically took 30 minutes (median), with most spending between 20 and 60 minutes. When averaged across all respondents, including days when errands were not done with a dog, this equated to 24 minutes per day.

Some activities happened less frequently, meaning their daily averages appear shorter despite taking longer on the days they occurred. Health and wellbeing care at home, such as grooming or giving medication, was reported by 56% of owners the previous day. On those days, owners typically spent 10–20 minutes, averaging 9 minutes per day across the whole sample.

Training at home was reported by 40% of owners, usually lasting 10–25 minutes, but averaging 8 minutes per day when spread across all respondents and days. Health or wellbeing appointments, such as vet or grooming visits, were less common, with 15% of owners reporting one the previous day. These visits typically lasted 15–60 minutes, including travel time, but averaged 6 minutes per day overall.



The least frequent activity was dog sports or training away from home, including classes or organised sessions like agility. Only 11% of owners reported doing this the previous day. When it occurred, sessions usually lasted 15–50 minutes, but averaged just 4 minutes per day across all respondents.

These findings show that while some aspects of dog care are occasional, walking, feeding, play, and enrichment, as would be expected, require time and consistency almost every day.

## Who spends more time with their dog?

Time spent caring for a dog varied depending on household, owner, and dog characteristics. Owners who lived alone spent around 7% more time per dog on daily care than those in multi-person households, reflecting that dog care is shared when more than one person is present. In homes with multiple dogs, the time spent per dog was slightly lower, as many activities are done together.

Owner age also played a role. Middle-aged and older owners generally spent more time per dog than younger adults, which may reflect differences in time availability or lifestyle. There was little difference between men and women once other factors were taken into account.

Dogs themselves also influenced daily routines. Younger dogs required slightly more time each day (owing to more training), while older dogs tended to have less time spent on them. Smaller dogs were associated with slightly less time dedicated to them, although differences were modest, while very large dogs often required more time for activities such as grooming. Interestingly, there was little difference between weekdays and weekends, indicating that dog care is a consistent part of daily life rather than concentrated on days off.

## Everyday joy, everyday responsibility

For anyone thinking about getting a dog, these findings highlight the reality of dog ownership: on average, owners need to find at least two hours every day, not just at weekends, to meet their dog's needs. From walking and feeding to training and grooming, dogs shape how people organise their time every single day.

While dogs bring joy, comfort, and motivation to get outside, these results also underline the level of commitment involved. Understanding what everyday life with a dog looks like is important, both for people considering getting a dog and for shaping the support, services, and advice needed to help dogs and their owners live well together.

## How we analysed daily activities

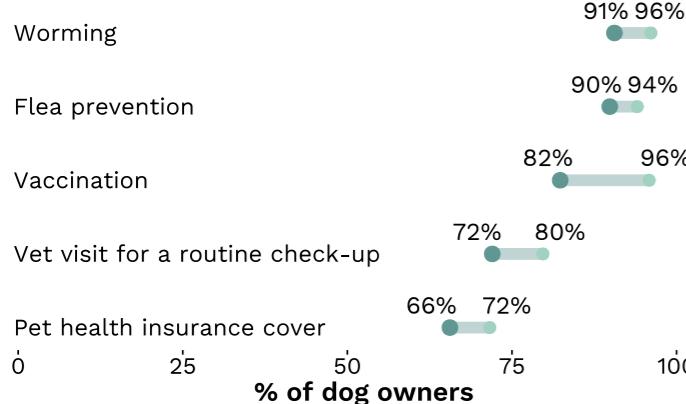
Owners told us how much time they spent on different dog-related activities the previous day. Some activities, such as training or vet visits, do not happen every day, so we used statistical methods that allowed us to look separately at whether an activity happened at all, and how much time was spent on it when it did happen.

# Health, care, and services

Most owners reported that their dogs were in good health. Around seven in ten dogs (71%) were described as having either good health with no (52%) or low medical needs (19%), while 14% had moderate medical needs. Fewer than one in six dogs were reported to have somewhat (9%) or highly complex (6%) medical needs.

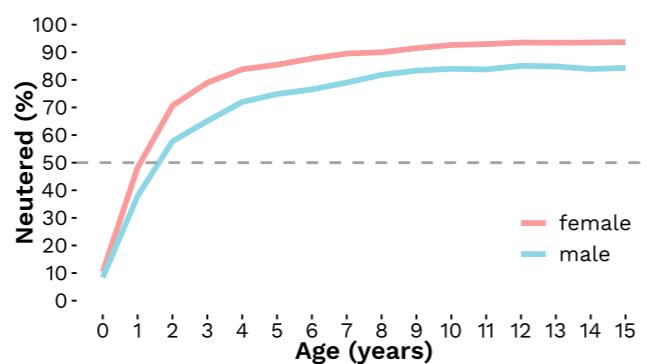
Use of preventative healthcare was widespread. Almost all owners reported using worming treatments (96%), flea prevention (94%), and vaccinations (96%) at some point in their dog's life.<sup>16</sup> While lifetime vaccination rates were high, uptake was lower when looking at the past 12 months, suggesting that some dogs may not be receiving vaccinations on an annual basis.<sup>17</sup> Routine veterinary check-ups were also common, though not done by everyone every year, with 80% of dogs having seen a vet for a general check-up at some point, and 72% having done so in the last 12 months.

## Preventative healthcare uptake: last year vs ever

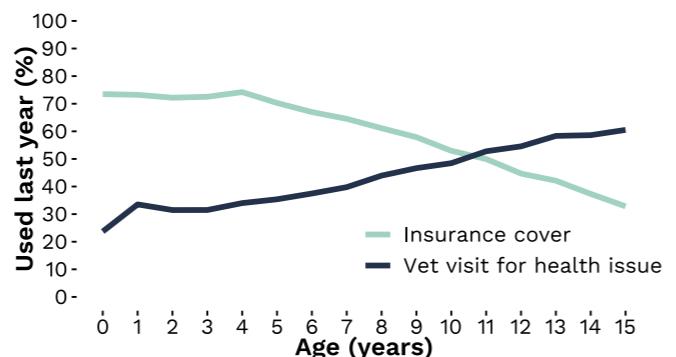


Neutering was common, with 71% of dogs in the survey either spayed or castrated. By two years of age, 64% had been neutered. Female dogs were slightly more likely to be neutered than males and tended to be neutered earlier, with neutering rates increasing with age before plateauing from around four years onwards. Overall, this suggests that neutering remains a widely used preventative health decision among UK dog owners.

## % of dogs neutered by age and sex



Nearly three-quarters of dogs (72%) had pet insurance at some point in their life, but only two-thirds (66%) reported having cover in the past year. The proportion of dogs covered by pet insurance decreased with age, probably due to increasing insurance premiums. This pattern coincided with an increase in the proportion of dogs visiting a vet for a specific health issue as they got older.



<sup>16</sup> Which of these has your dog had? Please select all that you can remember using for your dog in their lifetime. Was this in the last 12 months? Yes / No / Can't remember. (n = 319,893)

<sup>17</sup> It is recommended that dogs receive a leptospirosis booster vaccine annually and canine adenovirus, parvovirus, and distemper booster vaccine every three years. Kennel cough and rabies vaccines may be given depending on lifestyle factors. <https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/dog-advice/health-wellbeing/essentials/vaccinations>

Beyond essential healthcare, use of other services varied considerably. Professional grooming (including nail-trimming) was used by over half of owners (55%), with 49% using these services in the last 12 months. In contrast, formal training support was less commonly accessed. While 36% of owners had attended a training class at some point, this was most often during puppyhood (37% of dogs under one year old). Ongoing engagement was much lower, with only 11% of dogs having attended a class in the past year, falling to just 5% among five-year-old dogs. One-to-one sessions with trainers or behaviourists were used by only a small minority of owners.

Support services that help owners manage daily care were used by a smaller proportion of respondents. Around one in six owners had ever used a dog walker (17%), and fewer than one in ten had used daycare (9%) or a dog sitter who visits the home (9%). Once used, however, these services tended to be used consistently, with around three-quarters of previous users continuing to access them in the past year. Use of charitable support, such as dog food banks, was very low (0.6%), though this may not fully capture unmet need.



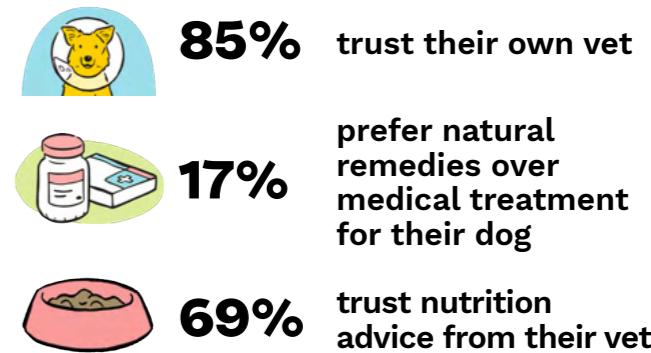
## Training and behaviour support gap

**36%** have attended training classes

**11%** attended in the last year

Trust in veterinary professionals was generally high. Most owners said they trusted their own vet (85%) and veterinary professionals more broadly (75%), and over two-thirds (69%) said they would trust nutrition advice from their vet. However, only two-thirds of owners (66%) said they check the qualifications of dog professionals before working with them. Views on dog diets were mixed, with 17% believing commercially formulated kibble is better for dogs and 15% believing the opposite, while most owners neither agreed nor disagreed. Around one in six owners (17%) said that they prefer to use natural remedies over medical treatment for their dog.

## Trust in veterinary professionals



Overall, these findings suggest that while dogs' basic preventative healthcare needs are being met by most owners, engagement with training, behaviour support, and use of some preventative services is more limited. Understanding the range of factors that influence these choices, whether cost- or access-related, or driven by beliefs and attitudes, is important for shaping services that support dogs and their owners earlier, before problems escalate.

## Cost pressures on dog owners

Rising living costs are affecting many aspects of dog ownership. Veterinary fees have been under increased scrutiny, including an ongoing Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) investigation into the UK veterinary services market, while owners are also facing higher costs for food, insurance, and care services ('dog-flation'). These pressures may influence how and when owners access support for their dogs.

# Dogs in society

With approximately 13 million dogs in the UK,<sup>18</sup> dogs are a part of everyday life, shaping how people experience shared spaces such as parks, pavements, and public transport. With UK society becoming more polarised and less trusting,<sup>19</sup> everyday interactions involving dogs can reflect both tensions and opportunities for connection within our communities. To explore this, we asked dog owners, and in some cases both owners and non-owners, about their views on dogs in public, responsible ownership, and shared spaces.<sup>20</sup>

## Dogs Trust's tips for walks

**Ask first:** Be respectful of other dog walkers. Always check before allowing dogs to greet. If the dog approaching is on a lead, put yours on a lead too.

**Ensure your dog comes back when called.** If your dog does not recall reliably, keep them on a lead in public.

**Stay alert:** Keep dogs under control, especially around other dogs, people, livestock, and wildlife. This means in sight, listening to you, or on a lead.

**Bag it, bin it:** Pick up after your dog and dispose of waste responsibly.

**Mix it up:** Vary routes to support enrichment while reducing pressure on busy areas.

[dogstrust.org.uk/get-help/behaviour-support-line](https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/get-help/behaviour-support-line)



## What picking up dog poo tells us about responsibility and community

There was near-unanimous agreement among dog owners (92%) that dog poo should never be left in public places, even if bagged to collect later. However, perceptions of wider community behaviour were less positive, with only 53% of owners believing that most people in their area were responsible about picking up after their dogs. These perceptions varied by location. Respondents in more affluent areas were more likely to feel that most owners in their community picked up after their dogs, while confidence was lower in more socio-economically deprived areas.<sup>21</sup> Although this survey cannot establish cause and effect, visible issues such as dog fouling may reflect wider community dissatisfaction and reduced social cohesion, rather than individual irresponsibility alone.<sup>22</sup> A small minority of owners (8%) felt it was acceptable to leave dog poo in rural environments, despite evidence that dog waste can transmit disease,<sup>23</sup> and damage habitats and soil health.<sup>24</sup> Almost half of non-owners (49%) said they would confront someone who failed to pick up dog poo, highlighting how dog fouling remains a visible and emotive issue in shared spaces.

**53%** of owners think most people in their area are responsible about picking up dog poo



## Managing dogs in public spaces

Support for dog-friendly public spaces was generally high, particularly for access to public transport. Most dog owners (84%) and non-owners (79%) agreed that dogs should be allowed on public transport. Support was lower for cafés and restaurants, with 59% of owners and 48% of non-owners in favour. Fewer people supported dogs being allowed in supermarkets (24% of owners and 20% of non-owners).



**84%** agreed that dogs should be allowed on public transport

There was broad agreement that dogs should be managed carefully in public. Two-thirds of dog owners (66%) and almost three-quarters of non-owners (74%) felt dogs should be kept on lead in all public spaces except those specifically designated for off-lead use. Similarly, 60% of owners and 67% of non-owners supported having separate on-lead and off-lead areas for walking dogs. More restrictively, around one-third of both groups (31% of owners and 36% of non-owners) felt dogs should not be allowed off-lead in public parks at all.



There was broad agreement that dogs should be managed carefully in public.

<sup>18</sup> McMillan et al. (2024) Estimation of the size, density, and demographic distribution of the UK pet dog population in 2019. *Scientific Reports*, 14, 31746. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-024-82358-y>

<sup>19</sup> The State of Us: Community strength and cohesion in the UK - A foundational report by British Future and the Belong Network to the Independent Commission on Community and Cohesion <https://www.britishfuture.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/The-State-of-Us-report.15.7.25.pdf>

<https://www.moreincommon.org.uk/our-work/research/social-cohesion-a-snapshot>

<https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenEvidence/136136/pdf>

<sup>20</sup> We asked "How much do you agree or disagree with these statements?" on a 5-point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

<sup>21</sup> We used postcode district (first half of postcode) data mapped to the Socioeconomic Index for Small Areas (SEISA) 2021 <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/research/seisa>

<sup>22</sup> Derges et al. (2012) Complaints about dog faeces as a symbolic representation of incivility in London, UK: a qualitative study. *Critical Public Health*, 22, 419-425. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09581596.2012.710738>

<sup>23</sup> Wright et al. (2016) The prevalence of intestinal nematodes in cats and dogs from Lancashire, north-west England. *Journal of Small Animal Practice*, 57, 393-5. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jsap.12478>

<sup>24</sup> DeFrenne et al. (2022) Nutrient fertilization by dogs in peri-urban ecosystems. *Ecological Solutions and Evidence*, 3, e12128. <https://doi.org/10.1002/2688-8319.12128>

## Concerns about other people's dogs

Concerns about unfamiliar dogs were common, even among dog owners themselves. Four in ten owners (40%) said they worry about the behaviour of other people's dogs and what this means for keeping their own dog safe. These concerns echo findings elsewhere in the report showing that reliable recall is a common challenge, and that some dogs are let off lead despite not always coming back when called.

Media coverage of dog attacks and heightened focus on specific breeds may also influence how safe people feel around unfamiliar dogs. In this context, perceptions of risk were often linked to dogs belonging to others, with 76% of dog owners believing they were more likely to be bitten by another dog than by their own.

## Breed perceptions and division

Beliefs about breed-related risk were widespread, with 62% of respondents agreeing that some breeds are more aggressive than others. Recent policy decisions, such as the ban on XL Bully dogs, appear to reflect and reinforce these divisions. When asked about the ban, a third of respondents (33%) felt it was unnecessary, while 40% supported the restrictions,<sup>25</sup> highlighting how views on breed-specific legislation remain polarised.

Reflecting wider unease about the pace of social change, around a quarter of respondents expressed concern about dogs' place in modern life. Just over one in four (26%) said they were worried about the expectations being placed on dogs in today's society, and a similar proportion (26%) said they were concerned about how the world is changing for dogs. These responses point to a broader sense that dogs may be under increasing pressure to adapt to busy, human-centred environments.



## Dogs, society, and policy

Public concern about dog safety and behaviour increasingly shapes policy and media debate. Our research highlights the importance of evidence-led approaches that focus on responsible dog ownership and owner support, rather than blame or breed.

In the Animal Welfare Strategy released in December 2025, we were disappointed that the Government failed to outline how it will address dog control incidents and did not commit to concrete actions.

Reform of dog control legislation is long overdue, and we want to see effective breed-neutral legislation instead of laws that target specific dog breeds.

## Living alongside dogs

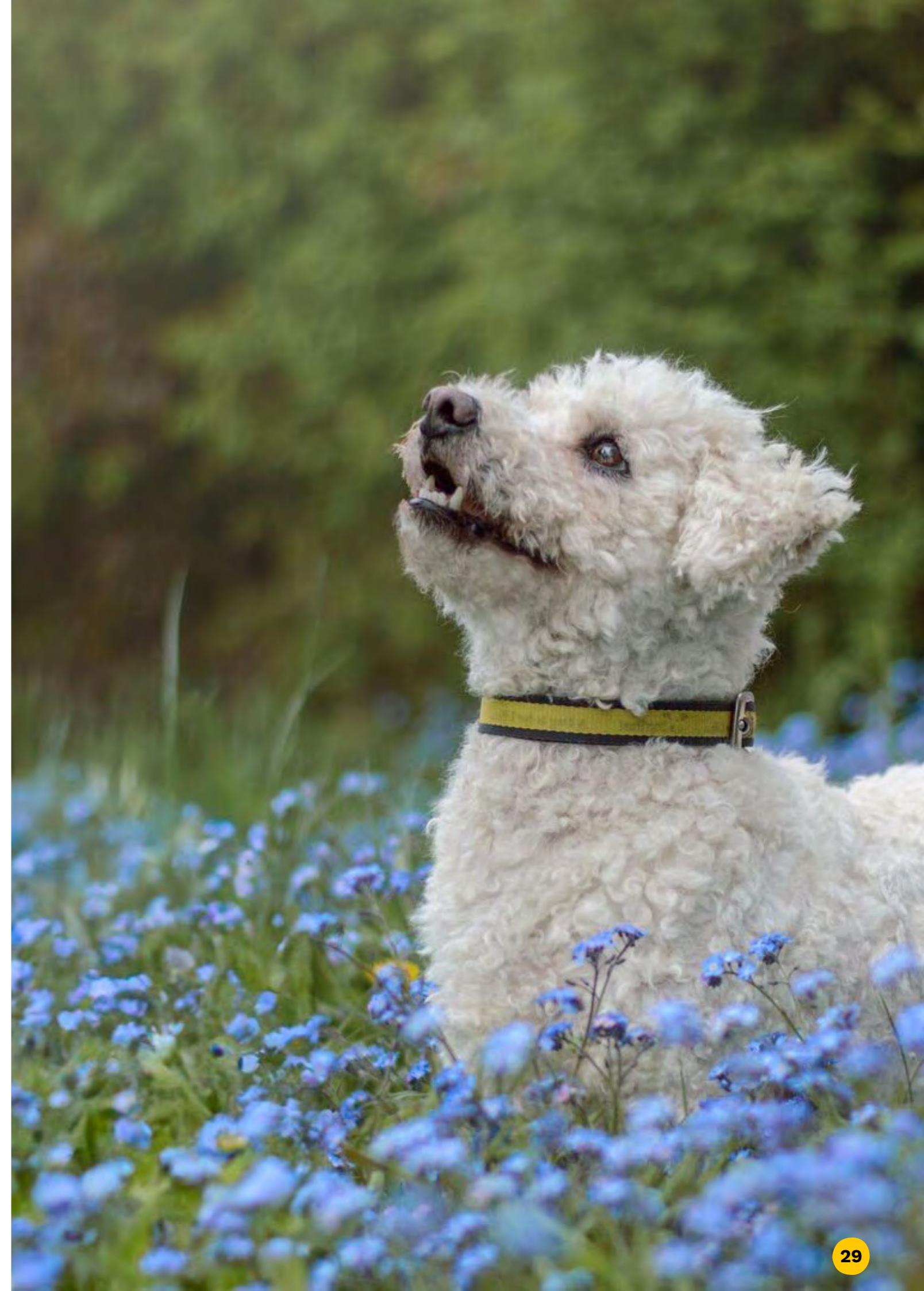
Alongside these challenges, dogs also have the potential to bring people together. Many owners told us that living with a dog helps them feel more connected to others, with 76% saying that having a dog helps them feel less isolated. In public spaces, dogs can act as social bridges, sparking conversation and shared experiences between people who might otherwise not interact.

Overall, these findings highlight the delicate balance required when dogs share space with people and other animals. While dogs bring enjoyment and connection to many, they also require thoughtful management to ensure everyone feels safe and comfortable. Supporting responsible ownership, respectful use of shared spaces, and better understanding of dog behaviour can help ensure that dogs remain a positive presence in communities, at a time when finding common ground matters more than ever.

**"Good walking etiquette helps dogs feel safe, calm, and confident in their communities. Small acts of respect between owners make a big difference."**

Dom Burke,  
Dogs Trust Behaviour Policy Officer

<sup>25</sup> We asked respondents to agree or disagree with the statement "Adding the XL Bully type to the list of banned breeds under the Dangerous Dogs Act was unnecessary" on a 5-point scale (n = 58,102)



# The human-dog bond

Dogs play a central role in many people's everyday lives, not just as animals in their care, but as companions and members of the family. Our findings show that the human-dog bond is strong across the population, but that the way people describe and experience this relationship varies by age, gender, and life stage.

## How owners describe their relationship to their dog

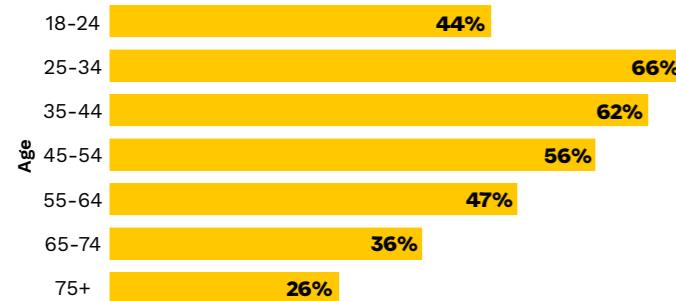
When asked how they see their relationship to their dog, most respondents described themselves as their dog's owner (69%).<sup>26</sup> Relational terms were also common, with 59% selecting companion, 50% parent, and 80% agreeing with the statement "my dog is my best friend". More authoritative terms were used far less often, including master (7%) and boss (5%).

These responses suggest that while ownership language remains common, many people see their dog primarily through a relational or caregiving lens rather than one based on control.

## Generational and demographic differences

There were marked differences between age groups in how people described their relationship to their dog. Two-thirds of owners aged 25-34 (66%) described themselves as their dog's parent, compared with just 26% of those aged 75 and over. Although authoritative terms were not commonly used, older people were more likely to describe their relationship to their dog using words like 'leader', 'master', or 'boss'.

### Owners who see themselves as their dog's parent



Gender differences were also apparent. Men were more likely than women, non-binary respondents, and those who preferred to self-describe to use terms such as 'leader', 'handler', 'keeper', 'master', or 'boss'.

Education level was linked to terminology too. Owners with undergraduate or postgraduate qualifications were more likely to describe themselves as their dog's guardian than those with lower levels of formal education. These differences reflect changing social norms around dogs, and may help explain wider variation in training approaches, expectations of dogs, and attitudes towards behaviour.



## Dogs as family members and sources of wellbeing

The emotional importance of dogs is clear. Almost all owners (94%) agreed that dogs should be treated as members of the family, and 73% said that dog ownership is a key part of their identity.<sup>27</sup>

Most owners reported positive impacts on their wellbeing:

- 95% agreed that having a dog is good for their mental health
- 84% said their dog provides emotional support
- 90% felt their dog makes them more active
- 76% said having a dog makes them feel less isolated

While over half of owners (55%) agreed that dog ownership is hard work, only 15% described it as stressful. Just 2% said that having a dog puts a strain on their mental health, and the same proportion said they struggle to cope with caring for their dog.

Non-dog owners expressed similar values. 91% agreed that dogs should be treated as family members, and 70% believed dogs are better at providing emotional support than human companions.

## When the bond is under strain

For many people, the strength of the human-dog bond means that difficulties can feel particularly distressing when things go wrong. Owners of dogs with behaviour issues were almost three times more likely to describe dog ownership as stressful compared with owners of dogs with no reported behaviour issues.<sup>28</sup>

This highlights how closely emotional wellbeing and dog ownership are intertwined. Behaviour challenges, changes in circumstances, or unmet support needs can place significant strain on both dogs and their people.

## The joy of dog ownership

When asked what being a dog owner means to them, and how their dog brings joy to their life, over 180,000 respondents shared personal reflections.<sup>29</sup> Common themes included companionship, routine, comfort during difficult times, and the sense of purpose dogs bring to everyday life.

For non-owners interested in fostering a dog, motivations reflected similar values.<sup>30</sup> 89% were drawn by the opportunity to help a dog in need, 78% cited companionship, and 61% liked the idea of supporting someone who needed temporary care for their dog. The most common barrier to fostering was the emotional difficulty of saying goodbye, reported by 47%.

Together, these findings underline the depth of emotional investment many people have in their dogs, and why access to timely advice, practical support, and services that help keep dogs and their people together matters. For many, dogs are not only canine companions, but central to their wellbeing, daily life, and sense of self.



**"Being a dog owner motivates me to get up in the mornings. My dog's health, happiness, and needs come before my own. Knowing someone is always excited to see me is the reason I always need a dog."**

– Female, 25-34 years old

**"He's the light of my life, my buddy and friend. I'd be lost without him."**

– Male, 65-74 years old

**"Yes, it can be stressful at times but the love and commitment you put in to having a good relationship with your dog is worth the effort because the love, companionship, loyalty and joy you receive in return is priceless."**

– Female, 55-64 years old

**"Since losing my husband, my dog is my world. She is my best friend and helps me keep going every day."**

– Female, 75+ years old

<sup>26</sup> We asked, "How do you describe your relationship to your dog. Please select all that apply." (n = 315,775)

<sup>27</sup> We asked, "How much do you agree or disagree with these statements?" on a 5-point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. (n = 319,940)

<sup>28</sup> How much do you agree or disagree with the statement "Dog ownership is stressful"? (n = 318,360)

<sup>29</sup> What does being a dog owner mean to you, and how does your dog bring joy to your life? (n = 187,602)

<sup>30</sup> What appeals to you about fostering a dog? Please select all that apply. (n = 5,985)

# Concluding thoughts

## Reflections on dogs, people, and life together in the UK today

This year's survey paints a detailed picture of everyday life with dogs in the UK, and of the changing relationship between dogs, people, and society. It shows just how central dogs are to people's lives, but also how much pressure is now placed on both dogs and their owners.

Dogs bring joy, companionship, and comfort to millions of people. Most owners describe their dogs as family members, best friends, and a vital source of emotional support. Daily routines are shaped around walks, care, play, and enrichment, with owners dedicating, on average, more than two hours each day to meeting their dog's needs. For many, dogs reduce loneliness, improve mental wellbeing, and provide structure and purpose.

At the same time, the survey highlights growing challenges. Expectations of dogs are high, particularly in modern, human-designed environments that can be noisy, crowded, and unpredictable. Many owners hope to include their dogs in everyday activities, from walking off lead to visiting cafés or travelling on public transport, yet a substantial proportion experience difficulties doing so comfortably. Unwanted behaviours remain common, and help-seeking varies widely depending on the owner, the dog, and the type of problem faced.

It shows just how central dogs are to people's lives, but also how much pressure is now placed on both dogs and their owners.

These challenges do not exist in isolation. They sit alongside wider societal changes, including rising living costs, pressure on the veterinary sector, shifting housing patterns, and a decline in social trust and cohesion. Dogs are part of public life, not only for those who own them, but for everyone who shares streets, parks, and transport. Our findings show strong support for responsible dog ownership, but also tensions around dog control, access to public spaces, and concern about the behaviour of unfamiliar dogs. Media narratives, breed stereotypes, and policy responses can amplify fear and division, rather than encouraging understanding and shared responsibility.

Importantly, this report shows that most people want to do the right thing by dogs. Differences in attitudes often reflect experience, access to information, and confidence, rather than a lack of care. Many owners are trying to balance empathy for their dog with competing demands on their time, finances, and mental health. When things go wrong, the emotional impact can be profound, particularly given the strength of the human–dog bond.

## What this means for dogs, owners, and society

From our perspective, these findings reinforce several priorities:

- Supporting informed decisions before and after getting a dog, including realistic expectations about time, cost, training, and behaviour across a dog's lifetime.
- Improving access to early, evidence-based advice and support, in formats that meet people where they are, before challenges escalate.
- Promoting responsible dog ownership in shared spaces, including good walking etiquette, understanding dog body language, and respecting that not all people or dogs want the same interactions.
- Challenging outdated myths and divisive narratives, particularly around training, behaviour, and breed stereotypes, with clear, consistent, welfare-led messaging.
- Recognising dogs as part of wider society, and the role they can play in bringing people together, supporting wellbeing, and strengthening communities, when supported appropriately.



## Our role

At Dogs Trust, our mission is to help dogs when they need us most. That means doing everything we can to keep dogs safe and happy with their owners, and when rehoming is necessary, providing compassionate care. It also means using evidence, like the findings in this report, to shape services, influence policy, and advocate for changes that improve dogs' lives and support the people who care for them.

Dogs give so much to us. This report is a reminder that meeting their needs, and supporting the people who love them, is a shared responsibility. By working together, and by grounding decisions in understanding, empathy, and evidence, we can move closer to a future where every dog enjoys a better life, and every owner feels supported to provide it.



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