



PRESS RELEASE

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Interdisciplinary Innovation: How can we advance research and practice in human-animal interactions?

Researchers and practitioners will come together at the SCAS annual conference on Sunday 20th October 2024 to shape the future of safe and compassionate Animal Assistance Services through interdisciplinary innovation.

This year's [SCAS conference](#) theme is 'Interdisciplinary Innovation: How can we advance research and practice in human-animal interactions?'. Leading UK and international experts will share the latest research and practice in human-animal interactions will discuss topics relevant to Animal Assistance Services (AAS).

As evidence grows that AAS programmes may confer benefits to clients, staff, visitors, animals and the wider community, organisations are increasingly introducing animals to health and social care facilities and to educational establishments as visiting and/or as communal resident animals.

If you are committed to ethical and effective involvement of animals in assistance roles, and work in health or social care, policy making or journalism and are interested in hearing the latest evidence-based research from academics and practitioners, this conference is for you.

The presence of animals helps to normalise a facility and provides an opportunity for the giving and receiving of nurture and for tactile comfort. Animal presence produces measurable positive physiological responses in neurotransmitter levels, improved cardiovascular function and a reduction in the levels of cortisol, the stress hormone. The elevation in oxytocin levels, for example, facilitates social interaction, improving communication between residents and with staff. Mood is elevated, people are happier. Stress levels for residents, staff and visitors are reduced.

Key-note speaker, Professor Emeritus Sam Ahmedzai will open the conference with an overview of the roles companion animals may play in palliative care. The introduction of AAS programmes across a range of contexts requires careful planning to help ensure that such interventions are safe for all involved and that animal welfare is not compromised. SCAS Chair Dr. Elizabeth Ormerod and Vangelis Diamantakos of Hartpury University will present the [SCAS Code of Practice for Animal-Assisted Interventions](#) which informs professionals, patients and the public about key steps required to achieve best practices. The Code encourages interdisciplinary collaboration across the caring professions in the planning, development and maintenance of programmes; and between practitioners and researchers in documenting outcomes. Through such collaboration, programmes become more effective and sustainable.

Four interactive workshops led by international experts will explore ethical considerations in animal assistance, training and certification of therapy and service animals, health and well-being of animals and their human counterparts, the role of Emotional Support Animals, innovations in animal-assisted interventions, and accessibility and inclusivity in animal assistance programmes. SCAS conferences are known for their lively discussions and ample time is allowed for live Q&A with the experts, and generous sharing of information, resources, and contacts between delegates.

The SCAS 2024 annual conference will again be a virtual event. This allows us the opportunity to invite people from all over the world to participate in a conference that maybe they could not attend otherwise because of travel time and cost restraints. It also widens the circle of knowledge relating to AAS and collaboration with other disciplines to regions where these are currently less well understood, and where there is often a deficit of AAS programmes.

Conference registration is significantly discounted for full and student members who can enjoy other benefits such as free access to monthly [SCAS webinars](#) throughout the year from expert speakers. [See here](#) for further information and to register. If you have any questions, please contact info@scas.org.uk.

You can join the SCAS social media community by following us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#). Social media posts can be followed by using our conference hashtag #SCAS2024

[The Society for Companion Animal Studies \(SCAS\)](#): Established in 1979 to promote the study of human-companion animal interactions and raise awareness of the importance of pets in society, SCAS is the UK's leading Human-Animal Interaction organization through its funding of original research, providing education, raising awareness, encouraging best practice and influencing the development of policies and practices that support the human-companion animal bond.