It is often the case that animals are bred specifically to enhance, or lessen the prominence of, naturally occurring physical characteristics, in order to make them more appealing to people. However, the exacting breeding selection required for certain appeasing features in animals may have a direct, and detrimental, impact on their welfare.

This is especially true of the pedigree dog industry, in which exacting standards require dogs to conform with rigid breed guidelines. Breed standards such as: body structure, coat colour, ear shape, eyes, and tail can have an adverse impact on the health and welfare of the dog.

The number of recognized genetic defects continues to increase, and so it is that breeding becomes more extreme, leading to greater demand for things such as more wrinkles, smaller heads, shorter snouts etc.

Selective breeding of certain features is becoming more prevalent
Dogs aren’t the only species to suffer because of the deliberate breeding of genetic defects. For example, brachycephaly (in which the shape of the skull is shorter than typical for the species) can be also be seen in certain breeds of cat, and is typified by a predisposal in the animal to an elongated soft palate, and stenotic nares. This can lead to what is known as brachycephalic airway obstruction syndrome, resulting in laboured breathing. This is a major welfare problem, and can cause several other related issues, such as: exercise intolerance, overheating, sleep disturbance, regurgitation, and, cyanosis. Artificial selection used to modify physical structures that are used for communication, such as selecting for a lack of tail in cats, and pendulous ears in dogs, greatly compromises normal and healthy social interactions between animals, which in turn can have a severe and negative impact their wellbeing.

Many pets are bred for long hair, however, without regular and careful grooming these animals are at risk of matting, bacterial infections, and fly strike. This can lead to discomfort, and in severe cases, intense pain. Diemetrically opposed to this, there are certain pets which are prized for their hairlessness, such as the Sphynx cat, and more recently, the Skinny pig (a hairless guinea pig). Again, although aesthetically appeasing to some, this is another example of a genetic oddity that can put the animal at risk of serious illness, and hairless animals are particularly prone to cold stress, and sunburn.
In the case of birds and fish targeted breeding can lead to conspicuous changes. Defects in birds are unnatural spring forms which can affect walking, perching and flight, mating, rearing young, feeding, and thermal comfort. Certain types of fish are bred for their thin and delicate tails, and as a consequence of this are at greater risk of injury and infection to the tail. The Water-Bubble Eye goldfish, for example, being a type of fish selectively bred specifically for its upward facing eyes which are surrounded by large, fluid-filled, sacs; however, these sacs can rupture easily, leading to pain and infection.

**Over-time, alterations to physical features changes character**

Selective breeding is focused primarily on appearance, often disregarding the psychological component, that of personality and behaviour. Selective breeding can lead to various behavioural problems, such as anxiety and aggression.

*Above: The Sphynx, a breed of hairless cat, is especially prone to sunburn
Centre: Excessive facial skin-folds, common to certain breeds, restrict the ability to communicate effectively and naturally
Below: The large liquid-filled sacs of the Bubble Eye Goldfish are susceptible to puncturing, making the goldfish particularly vulnerable to infection*