



Royal Kennel Club

A New Future for Dog Breeding

**Our new Breeding for Health Framework
- what you need to know**

Introduction

Dogs remain a popular companion animal in the UK, with an estimated population of 12 million. However, for some years the dog breeding sector has been under significant international scrutiny due to major ongoing concerns surrounding canine health and welfare.

These problems can be broadly divided into:

- a) husbandry issues** that compromise canine welfare, such as those related to irresponsible breeding to poor welfare standards, puppy smuggling and associated illegal practices
- b) breeding practices** that may compromise health or increase the likelihood of breed-related disease.

This is a short summary of a much longer report, which you can find [here](#). This report focuses on breeding practices only, considering the Royal Kennel Club's role within the wider canine breeding sector and how we can help to shape a better future for dog breeding. It provides a comprehensive overview of our current health work in this area, and offers a new plan for how future work can be improved to fulfil breeders' needs and support the breeding of healthier dogs whose wellbeing is prioritised.

Our full report responds to a recent review paper, 'A New Future for Dog Breeding', led by Helle Proschowsky and Peter Sandøe of the Centre for Companion Animal Welfare at the University of Copenhagen. This paper provides an international broad-picture review of current problems with dog breeding practices. It challenges kennel and breed clubs to address these issues more effectively and 'put the health and welfare of the dogs ahead of human goals.' We have deliberately used the same title and structured our full report to directly respond to this challenge.

The Animal Welfare Act (2006), Animal Welfare (Licensing of Animal Activities) (England) Regulations 2018, and devolved regulations for licensed breeders that apply to specific UK countries, state that breeders must protect their animals from pain, suffering, injury and disease, and that no dog should be bred from if it would have a detrimental effect on either its own health and welfare or that of its offspring. Moreover, specific legislation to tackle conformation-related disease has already been introduced in several European countries. We also need to respond to this changing legislative context.

Four sets of external stakeholder focus meetings conducted in 2025 have fed into our full report, with representatives of all breeds invited.

Attendees included breeders, breed health coordinators, other nominated representatives from breed communities, clinical veterinary specialists, geneticists and academic researchers with expertise in various aspects of pedigree dog health, and pedigree dog health campaigners.

Topics covered included dog and litter data, genetic diversity tools, sire characteristics and usage, data governance and communications with respect to genetic diversity, extreme conformation, breed-related disease, and other aspects of pedigree dog health.

What we are doing currently

The Royal Kennel Club has already instigated many changes intended to safeguard pedigree dog health. Our full provision is extensive, including the various initiatives and activities outlined below.

Our current health work includes:

Health reference documents - comprehensive *Breed Health and Conservation Plans (BHCPs)* (some breeds also have a BHCP Action Plan), *Population Genetic Analysis Reports*, and the RKC [Health Standard](#)

Health tools and resources - RKC website-based tools ([coefficient of inbreeding \(COI\) calculators](#) for proposed litters, [estimated breeding values \(EBVs\)](#) to indicate a dog's genetic risk of certain diseases), Royal Kennel Club [Breed Watch](#) (monitors extreme conformation at dog shows), *recognised clinical and genetic health tests* ([clinical screening tests](#) and [recognised DNA tests](#) offered by RKC or its partners), [health tests results finder \(HTRF\)](#) (check if individual dogs comply with Health Standard guidelines/check parents' health testing for puppies advertised on RKC's 'Find a Puppy' service), *health initiatives developed by external organisations*, e.g. breed club health schemes (mentioned in relevant BHCPs and the Health Standard).

Research support and education - *research outreach* (RKC connects researchers with relevant breed communities, and publicises external research projects on its platforms), *research collaboration* (RKC actively collaborates with research partners to develop new health and breeding tools, and also freely shares anonymised data for use in appropriate research projects), [The Royal Kennel Club Charitable Trust](#) - (significant research funding - the second largest UK animal-directed charitable funder of canine-relevant health and welfare research between 2012-2022).

Health-related educational resources - [breed health coordinators](#) (volunteers from breed communities who liaise with the RKC and are provided with targeted health support services and educational/networking events), webinars (available on [YouTube](#)), The Royal Kennel Club Academy (free online education for various topics including dog breeding and health), RKC [website](#) and social media platforms (extensive information on many aspects of canine health and good breeding practice), public awareness campaigns (various health-related campaigns/press releases, publicising health testing clinics etc.)

For the purpose of this report, we have divided breed-related health concerns into three categories:

- 1. Inbreeding** (issues related to genetic diversity; small, isolated breed populations; and practices that further promote inbreeding, such as the popular sire effect).
- 2. Breeding** for extreme physical features (described in the paper as extreme phenotypes) which can lead to various conformation-related diseases, such as respiratory issues in flat-faced dogs or entropion/ectropion (in-turned/out-turned eyelids).
- 3. Inadequate selection against disease-predisposing phenotypes and genotypes** (i.e., all breed-related diseases, ranging from diseases caused by a specific gene variant, such as PRA, to breed predispositions for complex diseases such as hip dysplasia).

In some areas, there is clear evidence of progress, but it is undeniable that limited genetic diversity, extreme conformation and breed-related diseases are still major issues in many breeds, and that some breeders remain reluctant to prioritise health over appearance or commercial gain. In our [full report](#), we share stakeholders' detailed feedback about how we are currently dealing with these issues and what they thought we could do better. This feedback has shaped the development of our new Breeding for Health Framework, which is summarised in the infographic on the next page.

Breeding for Health Framework

Supporting responsible breeding in a changing dog world

Why?

Dog breeding is **changing** – new scientific knowledge about canine health & social trends means we must rethink & review how we support pedigree dog breeding for health.

So, we asked...

60+ experts, including:



Breeders



Breed Health
Co-ordinators



Geneticists



Academic
researchers



Vets



Pedigree health
campaigners

for honest, **critical** feedback to help shape the new framework – they identified problems with



genetic diversity
& inbreeding



extreme
conformation



breed-related
disease & wellbeing



outreach &
communication

...and we **listened**

The Royal Kennel Club's new **Breeding for Health Framework** covers all aspects of health and welfare that influence breeding decisions for any and all dogs - with focus on 3 key areas: genetic diversity, conformation, and breed-related disease.

Breeds will be grouped by **shared issues**, not treated in isolation.

This means we can provide **targeted support**, and communities can **share experiences** and expertise.

Genetic diversity	Conformation	Breed-related disease and wellbeing
Population size	Visible conformation	Testable conditions
Harmful breeding practices/ popular sires	Distinctive breed features of potential concern	Untestable conditions
Limited pedigree data	Shifting conformation over time (conformational 'creep')	Temperament/mental wellbeing

What's next?

During 2026, we will be prioritising work that addresses the **top row** of the **Breeding for Health Framework**:



Genetic diversity in
small populations



RKC Nose-to-Tail
Assessment for
visible conformation



Improving our
approach to **testable
conditions**

Concluding thoughts

The RKC is working to provide effective leadership that improves canine health as widely as possible and delivers a new future for dog breeding that prioritises canine welfare while retaining breed individuality. We are uniquely positioned to do this for two reasons: we are able to provide traceability and transparent, multigenerational health information for RKC registered dogs, and thus should be much clearer on why people should buy an RKC registered dog; and we can provide effective, evidence-based, customised intervention to address the top health priorities for each breed.

Our new Breeding for Health approach provides a framework that helps buyers and breeders of all types of dogs navigate complex health information, and can help to shape what each breed 'should be' by gradually shifting ideas about what is acceptable. We aim to improve canine health through natural adoption, but if more governance is needed to shift behaviour in line with evolving ethical standards and legislation, we can implement this flexibly and responsively through the Breeding for Health approach. This includes introducing measures such as targeted mandatory health testing if they are needed. Outreach, data, and a route to better practice by offering incentives for health testing and breeding healthy dogs can all follow.

The RKC should support anyone who is breeding dogs ethically. It is now widely accepted that we need more ethically bred dogs, and that rescue alone cannot adequately supply the market for companion dogs. We can continue to serve our traditional core communities of pedigree breeders, but also reach out to other communities to better understand what we can offer them, and the barriers that separate us from them. Supporting and facilitating a broader 'ethical pathway to purchase' would tap into an important and emerging market, where genetic diversity and breadth of inclusion become positive. Through outreach and collaboration, we can offer customised support services for dogs of all breeds or none.

While we cannot implement everything that was suggested by the contributing stakeholders, and the changes that we propose in this report will fall short for some people and be too extreme to suit others, we can promise to continue working in an open, transparent and collaborative way to drive further effective change, and shape a better future for dog breeding across the UK.