

Proposal for Mandatory Class Signs in Show Rings: Fostering Inclusivity for Participants Who Are Hard of Hearing

Proposal put forward by the Italian Spinone Club of Great Britain.

The Kennel Club has long been a beacon for fostering community, setting high standards for dog shows, and paving the way for innovation in canine events. In keeping with its mission to champion diversity, accessibility, and inclusivity within the world of dog shows, it is crucial to continually reevaluate policies and practices to ensure that all participants, regardless of their physical abilities, enjoy an equal and enriching experience.

This proposal advocates for the implementation of mandatory class signs in each show ring at all Kennel Club-sanctioned dog shows, specifically to support and include individuals who are hard of hearing. This simple yet transformative measure has the power to enhance both the experience and the sense of belonging for participants and spectators alike.

Introduction

Dog shows are lively, bustling environments, but they often rely on oral announcements and verbal cues to communicate essential information. For individuals with hearing impairments, particularly those who are hard of hearing, such environments can present significant challenges. Important details—such as the class currently being judged, the order of judging, or class changes—are typically conveyed over loudspeakers or by ring stewards calling out information.

While these methods serve most participants, they can inadvertently exclude or disadvantage those who are unable to hear clearly, leading to confusion, missed classes, or even disqualification due to missed calls. The absence of accessible visual communication creates unnecessary barriers to all participants.

The Case for Mandatory Class Signs

1. Promoting Equality and Inclusion

At the heart of this proposal lies the principle of equality. The Kennel Club has an ethical responsibility to ensure its events are welcoming and navigable for everyone. By making class signs mandatory in every show ring, the Kennel Club can affirm its commitment to accessibility and levels the playing field for those who are hard of hearing.

2. Meeting Legal and Social Obligations

Legal frameworks increasingly require organizations to accommodate individuals with disabilities, and the Kennel Club is no exception. By proactively adopting inclusive practices, the Club not only complies with existing laws but also demonstrates leadership within the wider sporting and events community.

Moreover, the adoption of mandatory class signs serves as a visible and meaningful gesture, signifying the Club's ongoing dedication to accessibility and social responsibility.

Implementation Plan

Design and Placement of Class Signs

- Class signs should be large, clear, and legible from a reasonable distance, using high-contrast lettering.
- Signs should indicate the class currently being judged.
- Placement should ensure visibility from all common vantage points around the ring.
- Ring Stewards should be briefed on the importance of updating class signs in real time as classes change.
- Procedures for updating signs should be integrated into the standard ring management protocols.
- Provision should be made for temporary or mobile signage at pop-up or outdoor rings as needed.

Cost and Resource Considerations

- Class signage can be produced at low cost, especially if standardized templates are provided by the Kennel Club.
- Reusable and weatherproof materials should be prioritized for sustainability and longevity.

Education

- The Kennel Club should notify show organizers, clubs, and participants about the new requirement well in advance of implementation.
- Awareness campaigns can highlight the benefits of the change and reinforce the Kennel Club's commitment to inclusivity.

Potential Challenges and Potential Solutions

- **Resistance to Change:** Some organizers may view additional requirements as burdensome. Address this proactively by emphasizing the ease and low cost of implementation, alongside the significant benefits to the community.
- **Consistency Across Events:** To ensure uniformity, the Kennel Club can provide or mandate a standard template for class signs, with flexibility for local branding as appropriate.
- **Maintenance and Updates:** Regular reminders and spot-checks by Club officials can help maintain compliance and effectiveness.

By instituting mandatory class signs, the Kennel Club sets a powerful example for other organizations in the dog show world and beyond. The ripple effects of such an inclusive policy may inspire further innovations—such as visual announcements for other important information, or the gradual implementation of additional accessibility features, including live captioning, induction loops, or accessible programs.

The introduction of class signs could also attract new participants, foster greater loyalty among existing members, and elevate the Kennel Club's reputation as a leader in the field of accessible events. Importantly, it helps nurture an environment where everyone—regardless of hearing ability—can share in the joy and inclusivity of dog showing.