



HTM Community Survey - March/April 2026

In order to better understand and represent the heelwork to music community, the HTM Liaison Council distributed a community survey with the aim of gathering insight from across all levels of involvement in the sport.

The purpose of this survey was to:

- Understand the current views of the HTM community
- Gather insight into what people value most about the sport
- Identify key priorities for the HTM Liaison Council
- Support the development of a 5-year strategy for Heelwork to Music
- Help inform future planning, communication, and development of the sport

This summary has been produced following the closing date and is based on the responses received. It provides an overview of the key themes and feedback from those who took part in the survey and will be used as an advisory insight rather than a definitive representation of the entire HTM community.

Results

HTM Community Overview

The survey responses provide a valuable snapshot of the current HTM community, with contributions from individuals involved in a wide range of roles across the sport. Approximately 73% of respondents identified as current competitors at RKC HTM shows, with around 55% taking part in training shows and around 45% participating in fun shows, alongside many also involved in judging, instructing, and show organisation. Responses were also received from those currently training with plans to compete in the future (around 20%), as well as individuals participating for enjoyment, reflecting a broad cross-section of the community and a range of experience levels within the sport.

In terms of experience, the largest group of respondents (29.3%) have been involved in HTM for 11-20 years, followed by 24.1% with 2-5 years' experience and 16.5% with over 20 years in the sport. A further 14.3% have 6-10 years of experience, while 15% are relatively new to the sport with under 2 years' involvement. A very small proportion (1%) have not yet started competing. This demonstrates a strong mix of both long-standing and newer members contributing their views, with representation across all stages of involvement in the sport.

Respondents are active across both Heelwork to Music and Freestyle, with 15% competing in Heelwork to Music only, 27.8% in Freestyle only, and the majority (76.7%) participating in both disciplines. A small proportion (2.3%) were not yet sure. This shows a strong level of crossover within the sport, with most respondents engaging in both styles rather than specialising in one.

In Heelwork to Music, 19.7% compete at Starters level, 31.8% at Novice, 12.1% at Intermediate, and 22% at Advanced level, while 25.8% do not currently compete in Heelwork to Music. Novice is the most represented level, followed by Advanced, with Starters and Intermediate showing lower but steady levels of participation.

In Freestyle, 16.5% compete at Starters level, 39.8% at Novice, 14.3% at Intermediate, and 18.8%



at Advanced level, while 22.6% do not currently compete in Freestyle. Novice is again the most represented level, followed by Advanced, with Starters and Intermediate showing similar levels of participation.

Attendance patterns across RKC shows, training shows, and fun/non-RKC shows vary depending on event type, with engagement highest at RKC shows. For RKC shows, 8.3% attend almost every show (8+ per year), 36.1% several (4–7), 25.6% a few (1–3), 12% rarely (0–1), 12% are not yet competing, and 6% do not plan to compete. For training shows, 3.8% attend almost every show, 29.3% several, 30.8% a few, 22.6% rarely, 9% not yet competing, and 4.5% not planning to compete. For fun/non-RKC shows, 1.5% attend almost every show, 6.8% several, 36.1% a few, 39.8% rarely, 9.8% are not yet competing, and 6% do not plan to compete. Overall, engagement is highest at RKC shows, with participation decreasing in more informal or additional event formats.

Responses show the highest representation from the East Midlands (19.7%). Smaller proportions were recorded across regions including Yorkshire & Humber (10.6%), the North West (9.1%), South West (7.6%), West Midlands (6.8%), East of England (6.8%), Wales (4.5%), North East England (2.3%) and London (1.5%), highlighting lower participation in some areas where future growth could be focused.

Views on HTM Today

Survey responses show that Heelwork to Music is primarily valued for the relationship between handler and dog, with 96.2% highlighting training and bond-building with their dog as the most enjoyable aspect. Social connection is also highly important, with 64.7% enjoying being part of a community of friends and like-minded people.

When asked about the biggest strengths of HTM in the UK, respondents most commonly highlighted the supportive, friendly and inclusive community, which was repeatedly described as welcoming across all levels and a key reason people remain involved in the sport. Many also emphasised the strong sense of friendship and support between competitors, trainers and organisers. Alongside this, respondents noted the high and improving standard of performance and training, particularly at higher levels, as well as the creativity of routines and the ability to tailor work to individual dogs. The sport's flexibility and accessibility for different breeds, abilities and handler experience were also frequently referenced as key strengths.

When asked about the biggest challenges facing HTM, respondents most commonly highlighted the limited and uneven distribution of shows and training opportunities, particularly across the North of England, Scotland and other rural areas, alongside the financial and logistical impact of travel required to participate. Many also raised concerns around attracting and retaining new competitors, with barriers linked to accessibility, limited support for beginners, and difficulties progressing through the sport. In addition, respondents highlighted issues around consistency in judging, transparency in scoring, and the need for clearer pathways and continued development across all levels.

Training & Development

Most respondents reported that they can access suitable training for their level, often through a combination of group sessions, 1-to-1 coaching, online learning, informal training with friends, and independent practice. However, access is not always straightforward, with many highlighting that



availability is heavily dependent on location and a willingness to travel, alongside a significant reliance on self-directed or informal training where structured opportunities are limited.

Where difficulties were reported, the most common barriers were geographical distance, a lack of local trainers or clubs, and the financial and time cost of travelling. Respondents also noted limited in-person provision in certain areas, particularly for higher-level or regular sessions, and challenges for newcomers in identifying where to start, although several indicated that access improves once connections within the community are established.

When asked about the potential introduction of a Royal Kennel Club beginner award for Heelwork to Music, responses indicate a generally positive but cautious view. Most respondents were supportive, while a significant proportion selected “maybe,” often reflecting a need for more information or clarity on how the award would work and the value it would add.

Liaison Council Priorities

When asked what the HTM Liaison Council should focus on over the next 1–2 years, the most common priorities were:

- increasing the number of shows (48.1%)
- encouraging new competitors into the sport (42.7%)
- reviewing judging consistency and transparency (39.7%)
- improving accessibility for beginners (31.3%)
- supporting clubs and show organisers (27.5%)
- supporting and developing judges (23.7%)

When asked to select a single top priority, the most common response was increasing the number of shows (23.3%). This was followed by a spread of priorities including improving accessibility for beginners (14%) and reviewing judging consistency and transparency (13.2%). Overall, responses highlight a strong focus on growth, accessibility, and consistency to support the long-term development of HTM.

Rules and Guidelines

Responses indicate that the current rules and guidelines are generally considered clear and accessible, with 75.1% describing them as very or mostly clear, and 66.9% finding them easy to access. However, key themes highlight a need for greater consistency and transparency in judging, particularly around scoring criteria and barking deductions. Progression between levels was also raised, alongside consideration of a welfare mark to help ensure rules are applied more consistently and with greater clarity.

Overall, respondents felt that alignment with international HTM practices is moderately important, with 37.4% selecting this option. While a combined 31.3% rated it as very or extremely important, indicating support for improved alignment, 31.3% also felt it was only slightly important or not important. This suggests mixed views, with alignment valued by some but not seen as a universal priority.

Shows, Clubs and Accessibility

When asked what would make it easier to attend or compete more often, the most common response by a significant margin was more local RKC shows (73.1%), closely followed by more local



fun or training shows (45.4%). Other key themes included lower costs, more beginner-friendly events, increased club-based training opportunities, and improved support for new competitors.

When asked if there are enough shows currently, around 72.9% of respondents said no. Overall, feedback highlights a clear need for more frequent and more locally accessible shows to support participation.

Community & Communication

The HTM community's sense of representation and how well they feel listened to was mixed, with most responses clustering around mid-range scores, alongside a notable number of lower ratings. This suggests that while some feel the community is being heard, there is clear room for improvement.

Preferred communication methods for the Liaison Council were led by the Council Facebook page, followed by email newsletters, in-person meetings at shows, and other online platforms such as Zoom. Responses indicate a clear preference for using a combination of channels, alongside consistent communication and opportunities for two-way engagement.

Additional comments were strongly focused on the need for more shows, particularly with better geographical spread, alongside improved judging consistency and transparency. Respondents also highlighted improving accessibility, increasing training and support opportunities, and modernising systems such as show entries and information sharing. There were further suggestions around strengthening communication and ensuring the community is more consistently involved in decision-making processes.

Summary

A total of 133 responses were received as part of the HTM Community Survey (March/April 2026), providing a broad cross-section of views from across the heelwork to music community, including competitors at all levels, trainers, and those involved in both training and informal participation.

Overall, responses highlight a strong and engaged community, with key themes consistently emerging around increasing the number and geographical spread of shows, improving accessibility and training opportunities, and enhancing judging consistency and transparency. While many respondents expressed positive experiences within HTM, there were also clear areas identified where improvements could help support participation and long-term sustainability.

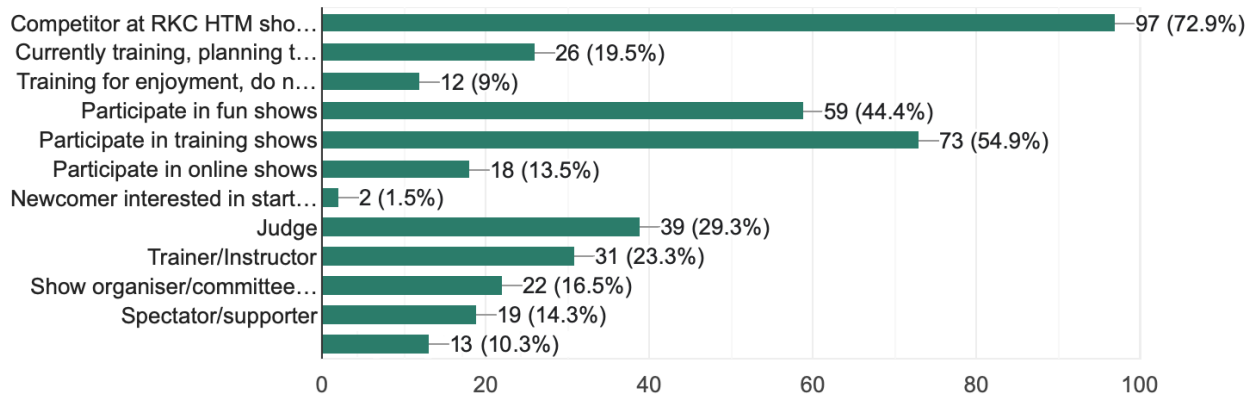
The findings from this survey will be used to inform the HTM Liaison Council's ongoing discussions and future planning, helping to shape priorities and support the development of the sport over the coming years.

Laura Reynolds

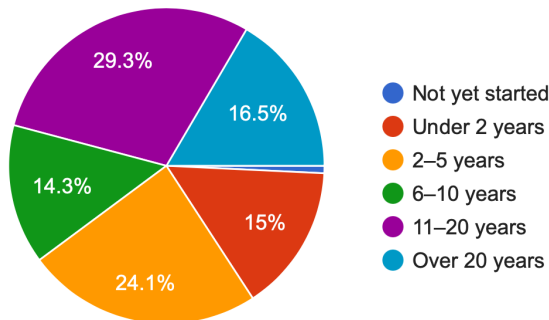


HTM Community Survey - Graphs

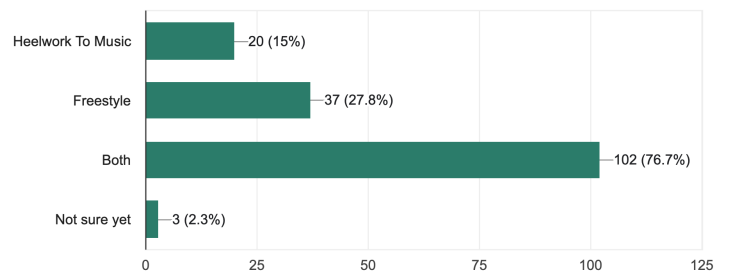
Which of the following best describes you?



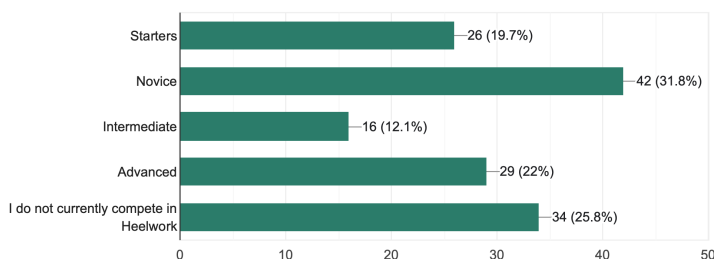
How long have you been involved in Heelwork to Music?



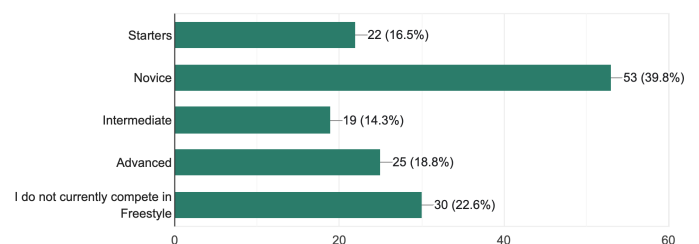
Which division(s) are you involved in?



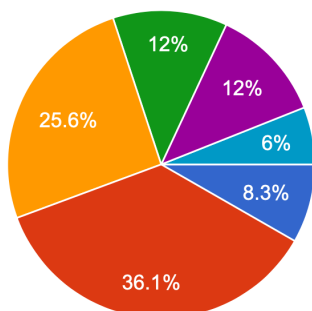
Which Heelwork to Music level(s) do you currently compete at?



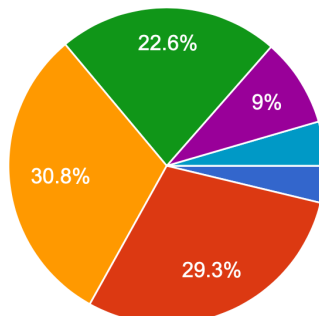
Which Heelwork to Music level(s) do you currently compete at?



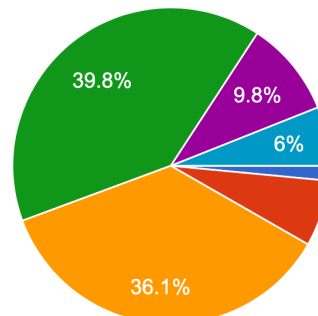
How often do you attend or compete at RKC shows?



training shows?



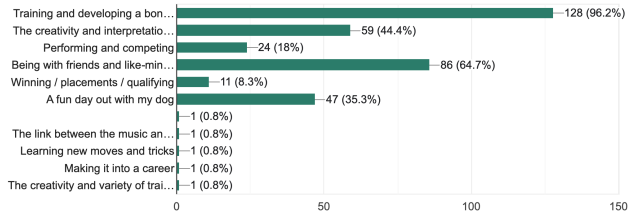
fun/non RKC/additional class shows?



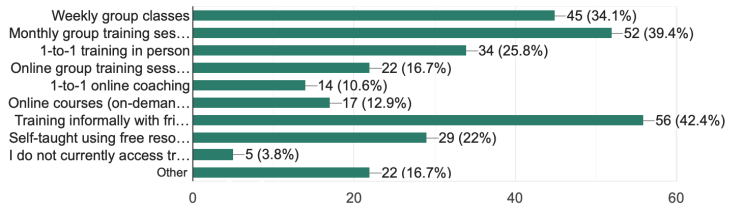
- Almost every show in the year (8 or more)
- Several shows per year (4 - 7 shows)
- A few shows per year (1 - 3 shows)
- Rarely (0 - 1 shows a year)
- Not started competing yet
- Don't plan on competing



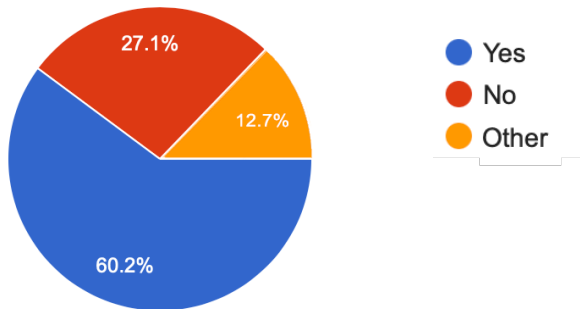
What do you enjoy most about Heelwork To Music?



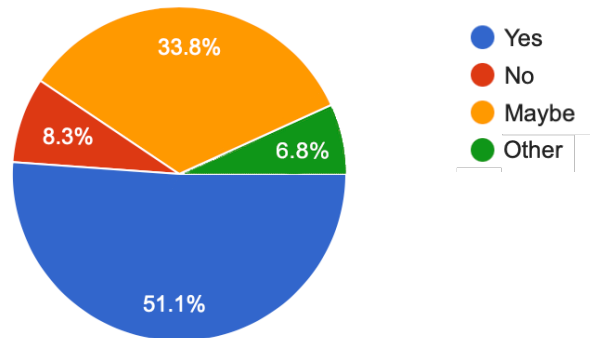
Do you currently take part in any Heelwork to Music or Freestyle training or lessons?



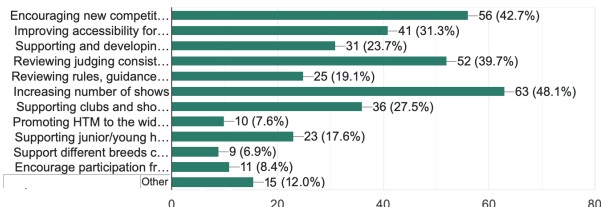
Do you find it easy to access training or lessons suitable for your level?



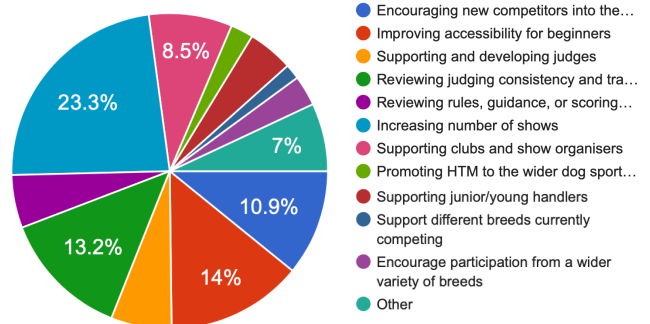
Would you support the introduction of a RKC award for those starting in HTM?



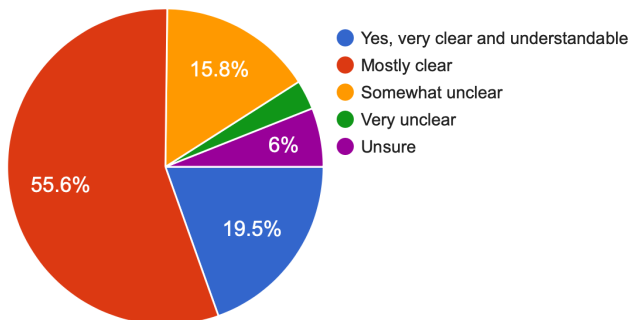
What should the HTM Liaison Council focus on most over the next 1-2 years?



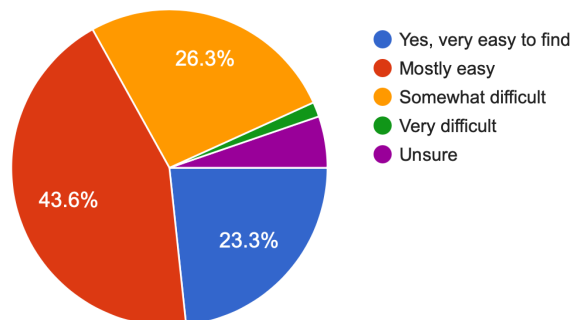
Of the options you selected above, which should be the Council's single top priority?



Do you feel the current rules and guidelines are clear and easy to understand?

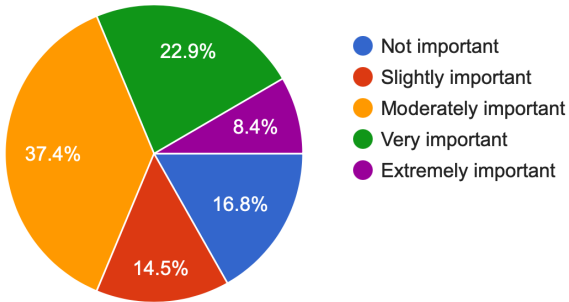


Are the current rules and guidelines easy to access and find when you need them?

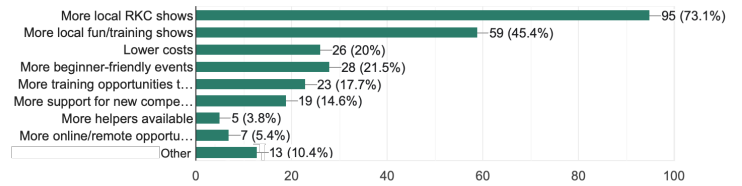




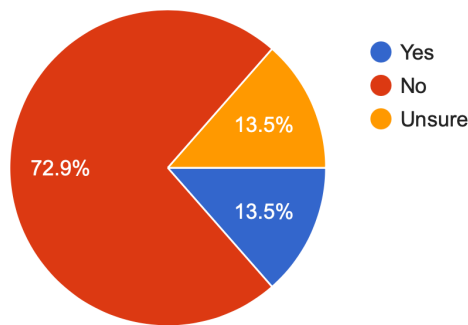
How important do you feel it is for UK HTM rules to be aligned with international HTM practices?



What would make it easier for you to attend or compete more often?



Do you feel there are enough shows?



How well do you feel the HTM community is currently represented and listened to?

