THE BREEDER’S DIGEST

YOUR GUIDE TO THE ASSURED BREEDER SCHEME

For more information visit www.assuredbreederscheme.org.uk
There are a number of questions or misconceptions breeders may have about the Assured Breeder Scheme. Here are some facts to help better understand the scheme’s standards and the expectations of its membership.

The aim of this document is to provide you with facts about the scheme and how it helps to provide puppy buyers with assurance that they are choosing a responsible breeder.

1. WHAT ARE THE REWARDS AND BENEFITS OF BEING A MEMBER OF THE ASSURED BREEDER SCHEME?

Free litter listings on Find a Puppy, discounted registrations and health screening/testing, discounted products such as whelping boxes and bedding, and knowledge that you are helping puppy buyers to get a healthy puppy whilst setting a recognised standard for all breeders and puppy buyers.

Apart from being listed on the Kennel Club website all year round, Assured Breeders benefit from free listings of their litters on the Kennel Club’s Find a Puppy service (each listing costs £25 for non-members). Registrations received by Assured Breeders are also charged at £2 less than non-Assured Breeders.

Further benefits include discounts on health screening and testing (Animal Health Trust 30%, Optigen 20%, CVS Vet Group 20% and Laboklin 10%) as well as on items such as whelping boxes, fleece bedding and grooming products. We are constantly looking for further benefits and rewards and welcome your feedback. Please email abs@thekennelclub.org.uk.

A longer term benefit of being on the scheme is that you are helping to protect the good name of responsible breeders, and protect dog welfare. Although we recognise that there are many good breeders outside of the Assured Breeder Scheme, we can only help puppy buyers to easily find good breeders by giving them a collective identity and assuring that they are adopting good welfare standards. By inspecting every member before they are able to register litters and by continually checking for compliance with the scheme standards we can clearly separate Assured Breeders from those who may be disreputable, and remain on the outside. This also ensures that the reputation of good breeders is protected and that members of the scheme are not tarnished by the actions of some of those outside of it.
CAN PEOPLE WHO HAVE NEVER BRED PUPPIES JOIN THE SCHEME?

No, applications can only ever be accepted once a litter has been bred.

In the early days of the scheme, it was possible to join the Assured Breeder Scheme without having bred a litter, but this has not been possible for around 10 years. Whilst people can apply to join the scheme before they breed a litter, they must be visited by a Kennel Club Regional Breeder Assessor before their application can be considered and they can only be accepted on the scheme once a litter has been bred.

All breeders are encouraged to join and inexperienced breeders are particularly welcomed so that they can be given guidance and support and are encouraged to adopt good practice right from the very start.

IS THE SCHEME ONLY FOR THOSE WHO FREQUENTLY BREED LOTS OF DOGS?

No - the average member breeds just one litter every 2½ years and the vast majority of breeders who belong to the scheme keep their dogs in their home as part of the family. The scheme has a Standard against which compliance is assessed and both high and low volume breeders can join the scheme. We need to ensure that Assured Breeders can meet the public’s demand for puppies, so it would be counterproductive to exclude those who are meeting the scheme’s high welfare standards on account of volume alone.
DO BREEDERS NEED STATE-OF-THE-ART FACILITIES (E.G. SEPARATE KITCHEN AND SPECIALISED WHELPING FACILITIES) TO JOIN THE SCHEME?

No.

As long as the required standard is being complied with, there is not an issue. The Kennel Club does not dictate that your bitch must whelp in a whelping room or not in your bedroom, for example, but it does require that you make reasonable provisions so that the welfare of the bitch is a major priority.

SHOULD MEMBERS OF THE ASSURED BREEDER SCHEME BE USING HEALTH TEST RESULTS TO MAKE RESPONSIBLE BREEDING DECISIONS?

Absolutely. We expect breeders to take note of all the relevant the health test results – particularly DNA tests where there is a very clear result about whether the dog is affected, clear or a carrier. Those who choose to breed despite the result indicating that it is ill advised will (unless very good reasons can be provided) be removed from the scheme. By utilising health test results and providing that they make careful choices, breeders are able to use a wide range of dogs in a breeding programme, ensuring that qualities such as temperament, genetic diversity, working ability and longevity are not lost.

There are health screening tests such as those for hips and elbows, where the results are not reported as a pass or fail, rather as a probability or amount of risk. Therefore, whilst we expect breeders to take these into account, this will be alongside other information such as inbreeding coefficients, temperament and other characteristics, for the breeder to reach the best decision about which dogs will produce the healthiest pups.
CAN A BREEDER BE ‘ASSURED’ IF THEY HAVE NOT BEEN INSPECTED?

No, every new applicant to the scheme needs to be inspected before they are allowed to join. Only Certified Assured Breeder Scheme members are listed on the Find an Assured Breeders section on our website and are clearly indicated on our Find A Puppy listing when they have a litter. All these certified members have received a successful inspection within the last three years.

All other members, including those that are not currently breeding from their dogs, are categorised as Assured Breeder Scheme Supporters and receive ABS health discounts, supporter badge and are eligible to re-join as a full member without a joining fee once an inspection has been completed.

Once a breeder has had a successful visit they are clearly indicated with a green tick on the website and issued with a UKAS certificate.

DO MEMBERS HAVE TO COMPLETE A LOT OF PAPERWORK?

Breeding dogs well is at the heart of the scheme – the small amount of paperwork that accompanies this is only to show that the Kennel Club has followed robust procedures and to ensure that the correct processes have been followed by members, as would be expected by those buying from Assured Breeders and the members of the scheme itself.

Whilst it is true that a certain amount of ‘red tape’ must be adhered to, this is largely in order to meet the requirements of the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) by which the Kennel Club is accredited. However, this is kept to an absolute minimum and the boxes that need to be ticked are simply those which are necessary to show that the scheme has clearly defined processes and standards which can be read, followed and adhered to – it is in nobody’s interests to have a scheme where the members are unsure about what is expected of them.

One of the reasons why the Assured Breeder Scheme came about was because puppy buyers had complained that, when they bought their puppy, they were given little or no advice whatsoever on how to care for it, and were consequently unprepared for taking a puppy into their lives. We do therefore require members to help their puppy buyers to be prepared for puppy ownership, and they need to supply written information on a number of subjects (e.g. diet, grooming and training) but the information needed is not extensive and the Kennel Club is always on hand to help with this task, and even provides templates on its website which make the putting together of a puppy pack in this ‘computer age’ a relatively easy exercise! Breeders have told us that it takes just a few minutes to produce a really comprehensive puppy pack and once done it can be saved and printed out for each new puppy owner.
DO THE PEOPLE RUNNING AND POLICING THE SCHEME KNOW MUCH ABOUT DOGS?

Yes, everyone involved in the scheme has expertise and experience in dogs.

The Health and Breeder Services Department, which oversees the running of the ABS, counts three championship show breeder/judges responsible for the day to day running of the scheme, as well as other breeders who compete in a wide range of Kennel Club activities. As far as the staff that carry out the visits to breeders is concerned, they have a wealth of canine experience in fields as diverse as training and behaviourist work, veterinary nursing and boarding kennel management. A number of these people are also breeders and some of them also have experience of working in fields which include a firm understanding of inspection processes. Most importantly, they understand dogs and dog breeders and are able to make balanced and well-reasoned judgements.

To find out more about visits, click here to watch our video.

HOW IS THE SCHEME POLICED?

There is rigorous policing (which has to be in place for UKAS accreditation) through inspections by highly trained assessors and checks for non-compliance when issues or concerns are raised.

Policing of the scheme is rigorous and the Kennel Club could not have received UKAS accreditation to certify breeders if this was not the case.

The inspections are carried out every time somebody wants to join the scheme and at least every three years thereafter. In addition, checks are carried out to check for non-compliances in between visits when issues or concerns are raised, including via the forms sent back to us by puppy buyers. All of the assessors are fully trained and subject to regular and routine competency assessments to ensure consistency of visits to all members of the scheme.

Every litter is verified for compliance prior to registration and must comply with breed specific scheme rules. Any exceptions are rare and only allowed after the Kennel Club has agreed and approved that there is a sound and compelling reason for doing so, and that the puppy buyer is informed at the time of sale.

The Kennel Club has removed and will continue to remove breeders who fail to follow the rules, guidelines or spirit of the scheme.
HOW DOES THE SCHEME ENSURE PUPPY FARMERS CANNOT JOIN?

Every single member of the scheme must receive a visit from a highly trained assessor to ensure they comply with high welfare standards before they can register their puppies.

Only breeders who protect and care for their puppies’ and breeding bitches’ health and welfare will be accepted on and remain on the scheme. Whilst every person has an individual interpretation of what constitutes a puppy farmer we all agree that the defining characteristic is that it is somebody who has little regard or consideration for the basic needs and care for the dogs concerned; in simple terms, those who put profit above welfare. One of the reasons the Kennel Club initiated visits to Assured Breeders was to ensure that they were complying with good welfare standards. As of 2014, all Assured Breeders have been required to complete a successful visit prior to registering their puppies – this has totally eroded the notion that the scheme could harbour large-scale breeders who keep dogs in poor conditions. Any such breeder will have been visited by now and been ‘found wanting’ and therefore removed from the scheme. If anyone has concerns about an individual member that they feel is in breach of the scheme rules there is a complaints process and concerns may be emailed to abs@thekennelclub.org.uk. Complainants should of course include any supporting evidence wherever possible.

DOES THE ASSURED BREEDER SCHEME MAKE MONEY FOR THE KENNEL CLUB?

No. The Kennel Club in fact subsidises the scheme.

The annual subscription to the Assured Breeder Scheme goes only part of the way to paying for the visit which each Assured Breeder must have at least every three years. In actual fact, the Kennel Club subsidises the Assured Breeder Scheme, which now employs a large number of permanently employed staff, and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. The Kennel Club chooses to do this as part of its ongoing commitment to promoting and encouraging responsible breeding practices.
Are members of the Assured Breeder Scheme the only responsible breeders in the country?

The Kennel Club recognises that there are responsible breeders outside of the Assured Breeder Scheme who put the health and welfare of their breeding bitches and puppies first, but it can be somewhat of a labyrinth for puppy buyers to determine who these are. The scheme enables the Kennel Club to signpost puppy buyers to responsible breeders, which helps to assure them they are choosing a puppy from a breeder who is doing all they can to produce well bred, happy, healthy puppies – and to have an organisation behind this recommendation, to ensure support is available and compliance checked at the highest level. Without the scheme, puppy buyers would have little way of knowing which breeders are adopting best practice.