

## REPORT FROM ATTENDANCE AT ACTIVITIES HEALTH AND WELFARE SUB-GROUP MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 1<sup>st</sup> JUNE 2016

I attended the Activities Health and Welfare Sub Group (AH&WSG) for the first time on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2016 as a representative of the Obedience Liaison Council.

### Background information

The AH&WSG is a sub group of the DOG HEALTH GROUP which develops strategy on the health and welfare aspects of the Kennel Club's work, co-ordinating and monitoring initiatives via the specialist sub-groups. These sub-groups allow for a dynamic approach on emerging issues, with their diverse external memberships each ensuring that perspective and balance is maintained throughout the Kennel Club's drive towards ever improving canine health and welfare. More information on the work of the Dog Health Group can be found on the Kennel Club's website, [www.thekennelclub.org](http://www.thekennelclub.org)

### The REMIT OF THE DOG HEALTH GROUP is:

- To develop strategy for the Kennel Club's health work.
- To provide overall co-ordination and monitoring of such work.
- To supervise the Fit for Function: Fit for Life campaign and other 'public' campaigns.
- To be responsible for recommending, on advice from the various sub-groups, the requirements for health schemes, the Assured Breeder Scheme requirements and other breeding strategies.
- To produce an annual report on the Dog Health Group's work.  
(available on the Kennel Club's website, [www.thekennelclub.org](http://www.thekennelclub.org))

### Discussion covered the following:

#### KC Guidelines for the Management & Training of Dogs Taking Part In Canine Activities

It was noted that the finalised version of the above document had been approved by the General Committee and was available on the Kennel Club's website at:

[www.thekennelclub.org.uk/media/742852/guidelines\\_2016\\_for\\_owners\\_and\\_handlers\\_with\\_dogs\\_taking\\_part\\_in\\_canine\\_activities.pdf](http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/media/742852/guidelines_2016_for_owners_and_handlers_with_dogs_taking_part_in_canine_activities.pdf)

A Press Release had also been issued to draw it to the attention of all competitors.

There had been some feedback from clubs and societies as to the extent of their responsibilities within the Guidelines. It was noted that there was no intention for the Kennel Club to issue any further clarification, but that should an issue arise at a show or competition, a note should be made in the Incident Book.

### Also there were discussions on the following topics:

- KCAI Accredited instructors
- The 'collapsible tunnel' which is a piece of agility equipment
- International Conference on Canine and Equine Locomotion, Royal Veterinary College, London, 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> August 2016
- Dog Activity Injury Survey
- Future research – Working Trials
- Analysis of Results from Health Questionnaires
- Veterinary Assessments at Prestige Events (Agility)

- Canine Sports Science Seminar to be held on 27<sup>th</sup> November 2016

## Research Issues List

### 002 Head position of the dog during heel test in obedience

The Sub Group noted that the Obedience Liaison Council had not considered that there was any issue regarding head carriage. However the Sub-Group was of the view that some dogs did work with a very high head position which may put them at risk of injuries to the neck and lower back.

It was accepted that dogs all had different conformations and therefore would work in different styles. However, it was important to ensure that dogs should be happy and comfortable when working. The Sub-Group was also of the view that public perception was important.

It was suggested that further research be undertaken to provide evidence as to whether an exaggerated head position was of detriment to a dog working in this way.

It was suggested that the study may be framed in terms of whether dogs were performing heelwork within the requirements of Kennel Club Regulations which stated that dogs should work 'in a happy and natural manner but should not impede the handler' and that the dog should be 'reasonably close to the handler's leg'. It was hoped that the research would be of value in determining whether styles of working which had become custom and practice presented any risk to the dog.

Since the AH&WSG meeting in June, the following press release was published on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2016

### **REWORDING OF DESCRIPTIONS AND EXPLANATORY NOTES FOR OBEDIENCE TESTS**

*The Kennel Club has reworded the relevant section of the Descriptions and Explanatory Notes for Obedience Tests. All handlers and judges should be aware of the new wording which will be effective from 1st January 2017.*

*These amendments have come about as a result of concerns expressed within the world of canine activities, about a small number of dogs which appear to have been taught to hold a position in heelwork which entails the dog effectively walking on its pasterns.*

*This poses a potential issue with regard to the health and welfare of dogs which must remain paramount in all Kennel Club licensed events. Judges should be aware that dogs should be balanced, with rear pasterns vertical, and that dogs which do not conform to this standard must be penalised as a major fault.*

*The amendment is as follows:*

*"Annex C to G Regulations*

*G(c)*

*1. General*

**FROM:**

*a. In all Classes the dog should work in a happy and natural manner but should not impede the handler and prime consideration should be given to judging the dog and handler as a team. The dog may be encouraged and praised except where specifically stated.*

**TO:**

*a. In all classes the dog and handler should work as a team. In all exercises the dog will work in a happy and natural manner whilst maintaining its natural topline. Its head position should in no way compromise its topline or impair the natural movement of the dog. At no time should the dog impede the handler's movement. The dog may be encouraged and praised except where specifically stated. The emphasis of all exercises is that the dog must be judged for accuracy.*

*The following additions to Notes for Judges have also been made:*

- In some cases the tendency to work with almost horizontal pasterns is a result of trying to achieve an extreme head position. It should be noted that most dogs adopting a high head position can do so without compromising rear end movement and careful thought should be given to the difference.*
- It is important to stress that this rule should not be used as an excuse to mark any particular style that is not to the judge's individual taste.*

*Kathryn Symns, Kennel Club Canine Activities Executive, said: "It is often argued that the way obedience training has evolved over the years has resulted in some dogs not necessarily working in a particularly natural manner. Nevertheless, 'happy and natural' are the words supported by this amendment, so this is what judges will be looking for going forward."*

*There is a FAQ document on the Kennel Club website relating to this matter – to access it, please visit: [www.thekennelclub.org.uk/activities/obedience/faqs-obedience-explanatory-notes/](http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/activities/obedience/faqs-obedience-explanatory-notes/)*

The importance of highlighting the role of the Sub-Group to all Activities Councils and Working Parties was emphasised. It was vital that such groups were aware of the role of the Sub-Group and the work it carried out.

Dates of 2017 meetings:

Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2017

Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> May 2017

*Carole Patrick*

*Kennel Club Obedience Liaison Council Member for Scotland*