

**Kennel Club Agility Liaison Council**

**Grade Review – Discussion Paper from the Grading Panel**

The grading review panel has collated a range of data to look at how many dogs are competing in different grades to provide a baseline for discussion. This has allowed us to identify the issues that affect our current grading structure and the problems it faces. It also has allowed us to identify the decisions that need to be made before we can propose any changes to the existing grading system.

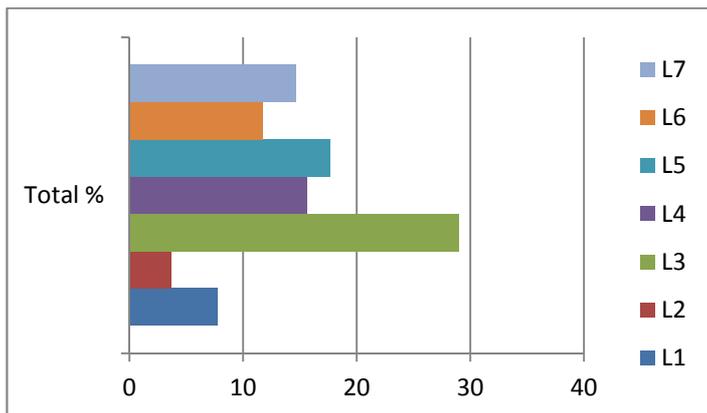
This paper provides a summary of the thinking to date and identifies the key discussion areas. The Grading Panel would welcome input on these issues to enable us to progress our thinking.

**Profiles of dogs competing in agility.**

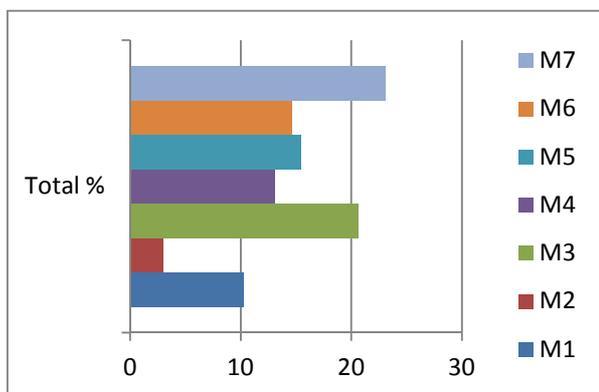
The Grading Panel collected a range of data from individual shows and show processors to see if we could identify a true picture of what grade/height combinations are competing. Data from show processing was difficult to analyse as it did not just include competing dogs and it could not show how many dogs competed when. Collating data on all KC shows on individual dates has given a clearer picture and showed a pattern that seems to be typical.. Further data are being collated to confirm the pattern that is emerging.

The data shown below are from a single day (Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> June 2016) when 7 KC shows were held with a total of 3,245 dogs competing. This show was before the introduction of the Lower Height Option. Further data are being collated for shows after the introduction of LHO and, although not yet complete, they show similar profiles.

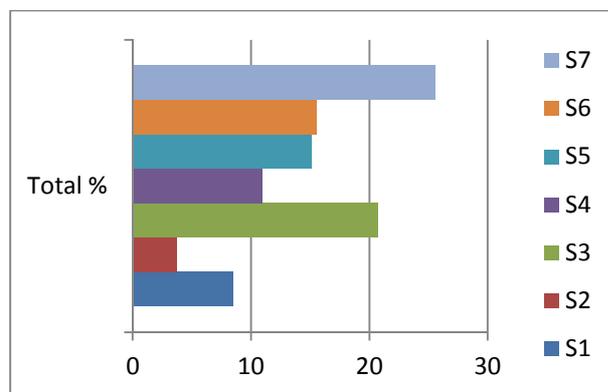
**Large Dogs**



**Medium Dogs**



**Small Dogs**

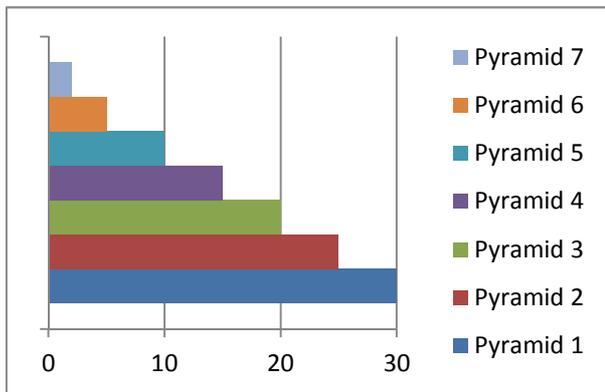


These profiles show that there is a clear distinction between the profile for large dogs and that of small and medium dogs. The small and medium dogs are clearly top heavy with largest proportion of dogs competing in grade 7, whereas with large dogs the highest proportion are in grade 3. Across all three heights it is clear that grade 2 is very small numerically.

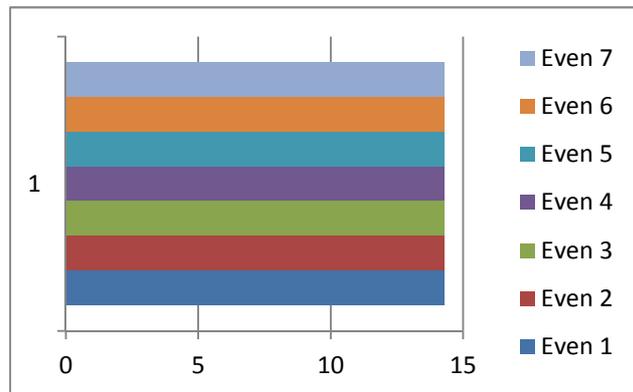
## Example Target Profiles

Before progressing what a suitable grading system the desired profiles for the hierarchy of competing dogs needs to be agreed upon. The following diagrams illustrate what the desired profiles might look like.

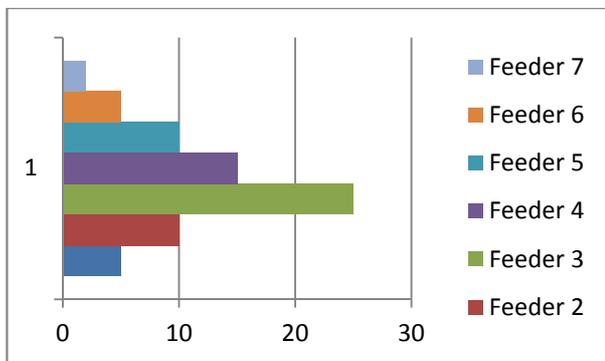
### Typical Pyramid Structure.



### Even Distribution



### Pyramid structure with feeder system.



## How to develop a revised grading structure.

The next stage of the grading review is to address a range of issues that will affect the outcome. These are presented to the Agility Liaison Council as discussion items at this stage. Additional data may be needed to allow us to draw conclusions but a wide spread input welcomed at this stage.

### Key questions needing discussion

#### 1. Should the profile of competing dogs be the same for all heights of dogs.

Currently the profiles (i.e. spread across grades) are very different between the Large dogs and the Small and Medium dogs. Should we be accepting this or seeking to have similar profiles for all heights of dogs? There are significantly different numbers competing in different height categories and so different profiles are likely if the rules for progression are the same and do not take into account the numbers entered. The data collected shows that typically the grade with the highest number of competitors in Small and Medium grades is Grade 7. This is significantly different to the profile for Large dogs.

#### 2. What profile should we be seeking to have in each height category?

Majority of sports and other competitive activities have a pyramid structure where the majority of competitors are in the lower "grades" with the fewest competitors being in the top "elite" grades. It might be that there are a higher number of competitors eligible for the lower grades than appear in the analysis of those entering KC shows because they are mainly competing at fun shows or they only compete locally. The profile at the lower grades may be less important to the structure of sport in that we could consider there to be two "leagues" - the "premier league" currently comprising those dogs in grades (say 4-7) where a pyramid profile would certainly be more desirable.

KC agility seeks to encompass all standards of agility – from the complete beginner to the elite national/international standard. This needs to continue to be recognised.

**3. Should experienced competitors with new dogs continue to join the structure above the base level?**

Most of the dogs competing in grade 3 are handled by competitors who have handled other dogs rather than those who have won into grade 3 from grade 2. Do we want to retain grade(s) for new handlers and if so how many are needed?

**4. Should the structure of grades and the system for progression be identical for all height categories?**

Currently we have a “one size fits all” approach to progression – the same system for progression applying to all our height categories. This means that dogs in the Small and Medium height are more likely to progress quickly through the grades than large dogs resulting in the “top heavy” structure we currently have for these heights in comparison. This is because of the lower number of dogs that have to be beaten to progress.

To illustrate this at one show analysed the proportion of dogs to wins was:

Large	559 dogs	21 wins available	4% dogs winning
Medium	147 dogs	13 wins available	9% dogs winning
Small	174 dogs	13 wins available	7% dogs winning

(Clearly this does not take into account dogs winning multiple classes which cannot be predictable).

While there is still considerable variation in the number of dogs in each height category keeping the progression system the same for all heights, and to meet a similar profile, would mean that progress would need to take into account the number of dogs. This could be achieved by making points/awards towards progression proportional in some way to the number of dogs in each class or by creating controls on the number of dogs competing in a class.

**5. What should the criteria for moving from one grade to another be?**

Currently it gets harder to move up the grades the higher up the Grades you are in terms of number of wins. However this does not take into account the number of dogs you need to beat. If we look at the example above, on this day there were twice as many large dogs competing in Grade 3 than Grade 4. However the number of dogs in grades 4, 5 and 6 are very similar.

Currently most progression is based on the concept of winning out (with the exception of moving up on points) is relatively straightforward and easy for people to understand and hence relies on individual keeping their own records and moving between grades appropriately. Currently records are not held centrally to monitor progression which make it hard to evaluate how quickly dogs progress, how many move up (in lower grades) on points or indeed if dogs are moving up correctly (e.g. are dogs moving up on wins that are not Clear). If a more complex system for progression is devised it may be essential to have a central system to collate data and manage progression. This would have resource implications for clubs and KC office.

**Further issues that will eventually need to be addressed**

1. Determining how many grades/categories do we want?
2. Deciding if the grading system should include qualification for elite competitions (Championships classes) or if additional qualification is needed.
3. Should grades be determined for the life of a dog or can there be circumstances where dogs can be demoted?
4. Consider how to map the existing grading structure onto any new agreed structure.
5. Consider how the Lower Height Option should be integrated into this grading system

*Sara Hawkswell  
On behalf of the ALC Grading Panel  
07 November 2016*