

**MINUTES OF THE AGILITY LIAISON COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON
THURSDAY 19 JANUARY 2017 AT 10.30 AM IN THE BOARDROOM, THE
KENNEL CLUB, CLARGES STREET**

PRESENT

Mrs P Baltes
Mr M Cavill
Mr S Chandler
Mrs Y Croxford
Mr A Dornford-Smith
Mrs J Gardner
Mr M Hallam
Mrs S Hawkswell
Mr C Huckle
Ms J Hudson
Miss L Olden
Mr K Smith

IN ATTENDANCE

Miss D Deuchar	Senior Manager - Canine Activities Governance
Miss R Mansfield	Working Dog Activities Officer
Mrs A Mitchell	Senior Committee Secretary - Working Dog Activities Team

IN THE CHAIR

MR M CAVILL

ITEM 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1. Apologies were received from Mr I MacDonald.

ITEM 2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

2. The minutes of the meeting held on 14 July 2016 were approved.

ITEM 3. MATTERS ARISING/RESULTS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recognition of Agility as a sport
 3. The Council noted that a pre-application for recognition of agility as a sport had been submitted to Sport England (previously known as the

English Sports Council) on 15 November 2016. It was hoped that a decision would be received by 1 February 2017, and if positive, stage 2 of the application process would then commence.

4. In due course, should the application prove successful, it would be necessary to make similar applications to Sport Wales, Sport Scotland, and Sport NI.

Lower Height Option

5. It was noted that the Board had approved the following amendment to Regulation H(1)(B)1.c. whereby, in the interests of simplicity both for competitors and show organisers, competitors would walk the course set at the height category into which their dog was measured.

H(1)(B)1.c

TO:

No practice is allowed on the course save that competitors will be allowed to walk the course set at the **Small, Medium or Large** height ~~the dog is to negotiate~~, without their dog(s) before the class begins. Hurdles ~~will~~ **may** be raised/lowered during the course walking time if multiple heights are offered within the same class.
(Deletions struck through. Insertion in bold)

Splitting of classes

6. The Council noted that the following amendment to H Regulations had been approved by the Board:

Regulation H(1)9.f

TO:

(1) Splitting of classes

Where classes do not have the Lower Height Option, classes should be split according to the following:

Where combined classes are split, they must be split into parts of equal numbers (to within one dog). Splits must be conducted on a random basis. Where graded classes are split, they must be split by grade. If a subsequent grade or single grade class is split, ~~they~~ **it** must be split into parts of equal numbers (to within one dog). Splits must be conducted on a random basis. Competitors entered therein must be notified of all changes.

(2) Where classes have the Lower Height Option and are required to be split, classes should be split according to the following:

(i) Where combined classes with one set of results are split, they must be split into parts of equal numbers (to within one dog). Splits must be conducted on a random basis.

(ii) Where combined classes with separate awards for Lower Height and Full Height are split, they must be split by Lower Height and Full Height. If a subsequent height class is split, it must be split into parts of equal numbers (to within one dog). Splits must be conducted on a random basis.

(iii) Where graded classes with one set of results per grade are split, they must be split by grade. If a subsequent grade or single grade class is split, it must be split into parts of equal numbers (to within one dog). Splits must be conducted on a random basis.

(iv) Where graded classes with separate awards for Lower Height and Full Height are split, they must be split by grade. If a subsequent grade or single grade class is split, it must be split by Lower Height and Full Height. If a subsequent height class is split, it must be split into parts of equal numbers (to within one dog). Splits must be conducted on a random basis.

Competitors entered therein must be notified of all changes.

(Deletions struck through. Insertions in bold.)

7. In response to a query, it was clarified by the office that classes must be split in accordance with the class details which had been published in the schedule.
8. It was also confirmed that for classes where the Lower Height Option was offered, Full Height must also be available.

Incident Book

9. The Council noted the contents of a press release issued on 1 August 2016 which gave guidance on the correct use of the Incident Book.
10. A concern was raised regarding instances in which competitors had been prevented from making entries in the Incident Book. It was confirmed that this was not acceptable and that any such cases should be notified to the Kennel Club. Further, it was noted that should a competitor wish to lodge an objection at a show and be prevented from doing so, he or she may lodge the objection with the Kennel Club up to seven days after the show.
11. It was confirmed that the Incident Book should be used to note anything out of the ordinary occurring at a show, even where no follow-up was necessary. Recording such occurrences may be helpful in protecting all parties involved should there be subsequent unanticipated repercussions.
12. Where two disciplines were taking place at a single show – for example at a breed show which also scheduled agility classes – it was advisable (but not mandatory) for each discipline to have its own Incident Book available. This was for practical reasons such as ease of access for those wishing to make entries.
13. The office was requested to provide a list of issues which had been reported in Incident Books during 2016 as it was considered this may provide useful information as to any recurring problems which it may be

possible for the Council to address. It was agreed that a report would be made available to the Council at its next meeting.

Communications

14. At its last meeting, the Council requested the office to investigate whether it was possible for any improvements to be made to the way in which information relating to agility was made available to the agility community.
15. It was noted that the office was in the process of investigating whether it was possible to link agility-related press releases to agility pages on the Kennel Club website and/or social media sites.
16. It was also noted that some people were still experiencing difficulties in locating the Incident Report form on the Kennel Club website. It was confirmed by the office that the website was currently under review and such concerns would be taken into account as part of the review. **Note:** the Incident Report form may be downloaded from:
http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/media/718294/agility_2015_incident_report_form_for_website.pdf
17. In response to a query it was clarified that The Scribe, rather than being a single publication, was now in e-news format whereby subscribers would receive an email which contained links to items on the Kennel Club website.

Proposed amendments to Regulation H(1)(B)3.i. – Collapsible Tunnel

18. The Council noted that a temporary suspension of the use of the Collapsible Tunnel, with immediate effect, was announced on 30 August 2016 due to concerns regarding the safety of dogs. The Board had subsequently approved the removal of the Collapsible Tunnel from the list of approved obstacles, for health and safety reasons.
19. It noted that the decision to remove the Collapsible Tunnel from the list of approved obstacles had been made on the basis of concerns relating to the health and welfare of dogs. Further, it noted that there were difficulties in carrying out research into the safety of the obstacle for ethical reasons, as it was not acceptable to carry out any testing where there was considered to be any risk to dogs taking part. Advice on ethical issues had been obtained via the Activities Health and Welfare Sub-Group, the membership of which included representatives from Nottingham Trent University.
20. Although generally supportive of the decision to remove the Collapsible Tunnel, the Council wished to record its strong dissatisfaction with the way in which the decision had been made, with no consultation with the Council or the wider agility community having taken place. As a result there was considerable unease within grass-roots competitors who felt distanced from the Kennel Club and its decision-making process. The Council considered that it would have been preferable for the suspension

to have remained in place until its views had been sought, at which time an appropriate decision could have been made which took into account the views of agility specialists. This would have ensured that the decision-making process was seen to be open and transparent for all concerned.

21. The Council expressed its hope that should a similar situation arise in future, its views would be sought prior to any decisions being reached.

Proposed amendments to Regulation H(1)(B)1a.(3) – Design

22. The Council noted that the Board had approved amendments to the above Regulation in respect of the minimum distances between obstacles. It had also approved an amendment to the Regulation which specified a maximum distance between obstacles.

Regulation H(1)(B)1a.(3) – Design

TO:

The course should require a dog to traverse at least 10 obstacles, but not more than 20 and all jump obstacles should be the same height. ~~Obstacles~~ **All obstacles which the dog is required to clear** should have a minimum of ~~3.6~~ **5m (4yds 5.5yds)** and up to a maximum of **10m (11yds)** between centres **of consecutive obstacles using the straight line centre-to-centre method** ~~except that this may be reduced to 2.74m (3yds) when the following obstacle is placed at 90 degrees or more to the preceding one.~~

(Deletions struck through. Insertions in bold.)

23. A query was raised as to the inclusion of a maximum distance between obstacles, which had not been included in the Regulation amendment recommended for approval by the Council. It was confirmed that the Activities Committee had recommended the inclusion of a maximum distance for reasons of health and welfare in response to concerns regarding dogs which may build up significant momentum over longer distances. Expert advice had been sought from members of the Activities Health and Welfare Sub-Group on the issue prior to the decision being made.
24. The Council did not raise any objection to the introduction of a maximum distance between obstacles, but reiterated its concerns raised earlier in respect of decisions being made without its views being sought beforehand.
25. It was clarified that there had been no changes to the way in which distances should be measured and that the straight-line centre-to-centre method should be used. Guidance was available on the Kennel Club website at:

http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/media/426667/calculating_accurate_agility_course_times_guidance.pdf

26. It was agreed that to provide clarification regarding the measuring of distances between obstacles, a press release would be issued.

ITEM 4. JUDGES WORKING PARTY (ACTIVITIES)

27. The Council noted a written report from Mr Huckle on the progress of the Judges Working Party following its meeting on 14 November 2016.

KC Academy

28. The main area for discussion was the Kennel Club Academy which was now active for Breed Show Judges. The Training Board had rejected the suggestion of an 'Open Book' examination for prospective agility judges but had agreed that the examination may be taken online via the KC Academy, prior to attending a seminar. This would allow for the two existing one day seminars to be combined into a single two day seminar with more emphasis placed on Course Design and Judging.
29. Work was continuing on the production of a script for a film to be placed onto the KC Academy relating to the Requirements of an Agility Judge. The film would encapsulate details from the existing presentation. Candidates would be required to answer 40 questions from a bank of 100, and the pass mark for the examination would continue to be 80%. The script was due to be presented to the Training Board at its meeting on 22 March 2017 with the objective of placing content on the KC Academy by the end of June 2017 to coincide with the introduction of the relevant new Regulations.
30. In due course other films would be placed on the website relating to other aspects of judging.
31. It was suggested that consideration be given to reducing the annual renewal charge for membership of the KC Academy, as it was hoped that doing so would encourage judges to engage and actively participate in the Academy programme. However it was highlighted that this was currently less than the cost of attending a seminar.

Number of Accredited Trainers

32. The Working Party had discussed the number of Accredited Trainers for agility, and it had acknowledged that more trainers, and a better geographical spread, would be desirable. It was also noted that some Accredited Trainers had resigned or retired, and that attention should be given to succession planning. Accordingly, the office had issued a press release requesting applications from suitable individuals, and responses would be collated with particular reference to areas such as Scotland and Wales which did not currently have good coverage.

Mentoring

33. The number of new judges requiring mentoring was also discussed and it was agreed that in order to reduce the burden on Accredited Trainers, Championship Judges would also be permitted to carry out mentoring. It was suggested that it may be desirable for mentoring to be mandatory at a judge's first two appointments, however, it was noted that this was not possible at present due to the insufficient number of available mentors.
34. It was also suggested that mentors should be permitted to attend judges training seminars on a free of charge basis, in the interests of consistency, however it was accepted that there may be difficulties for judges doing so due to time constraints.

Continuing Personal Development

35. Considerable disappointment was expressed regarding the very low uptake, noting that although Accredited Trainers had supported it, they were slow to undertake assessments despite a relaxation in the requirements which now allowed them to carry out assessments and compete at the same show. It was acknowledged that the assessment process was very time-consuming which was considered to be the main issue, but that Accredited Trainers would be encouraged to carry out assessments, even if they were only able to do one or two at a show.
36. It was confirmed that judges wishing to be assessed in order to help them develop their knowledge and expertise, should notify the office via agility@thekennelclub.org.uk and if possible suitable arrangements would be made.

ITEM 5. REPORT FROM THE EQUIPMENT PANEL

37. The Council noted a report from the Equipment Panel, which consisted of Mrs Gardner, Mr Hallam, Mr Chandler, Mr Smith, and Mr Huckle.
38. It was the intention of the Equipment Panel to arrange an open meeting with all equipment manufacturers in order to discuss ideas and solutions to help agility progress as a sport whilst ensuring safety and consistency of equipment. It was suggested that the Kennel Club Building at Stoneleigh would be a good venue for such a meeting as it was in a central location.
39. The Panel had also been requested to consider the potential impact of the Lower Height Option (LHO) in respect of the use of spread, long jump and tyre for dogs competing at LHO. Work on this issue was in hand.
40. It was noted that equipment from any supplier or manufacturer may be used by show organisers provided it conformed to Kennel Club Regulations.

41. A concern was raised regarding consistency of the performance of seesaws and it was agreed this would be added to the list of issues to be considered by the Panel.
42. An issue regarding the diameter of the Pipe Tunnel was raised, noting that Regulation H(1)(B)3.i. stated that the obstacle should have a diameter of a minimum of 609mm. However, it appeared that a number of Pipe Tunnels in use had a 600mm diameter. It was agreed that the Equipment Panel would check the sizes of Pipe Tunnels in use from major suppliers, and if necessary would submit a proposal for an amendment to the Regulation to reduce the minimum diameter to 600mm at the next meeting of the Council.
43. It was noted that for practical reasons it had proved difficult for members of the Equipment Panel to meet on a regular basis.

ITEM 6. REPORT FROM THE GRADING PANEL

44. The Council considered the issues raised by the Grading Panel. It noted that within the statistics provided by the Panel there may be variations caused by regional differences between shows and the way in which classes were scheduled, however, a good overall picture had been provided of the grading profile of dogs competing in each size.
45. A discussion took place as to how the Council saw agility progressing, and what grading profile it considered to be ideal for the future.
46. One suggestion was that all new dogs should compete in Grade 1 regardless of the handler's level of experience. There was some agreement with this although an alternative suggestion was that new dogs with experienced handlers should enter at Grade 2.
47. It was considered that dogs competing at Grade 7 should be the 'best of the best' and this should not be the level at which the largest proportion of dogs were competing, which was currently the case for both Small and Medium dogs.
48. The Council was of the view that the current profile was not ideal as too many dogs were competing at higher grades, and it considered that the ideal profile would be that of a typical pyramid structure with the highest proportions of dogs competing at lower grades, although there should be some elements of a 'feeder' structure whereby new dogs with experienced handlers would enter at Grade 2.
49. It was acknowledged that it was not possible to have complete control over the grading profile and that there were differences between the way in which dogs competing in Small and Medium moved through the classes in comparison with Large dogs. This was mainly due to the

difference in numbers competing in each size (statistics indicated that approximately 50% of all competing dogs were Large). It was not considered however that introducing different progression structures for different sizes would be desirable, or that such a step would be welcomed by the agility community.

50. It was suggested that the Grading Panel consider a requirement that shows may only combine a certain number of grades within a single class. It was agreed that this would be borne in mind for future consideration.
51. It was agreed that any changes made should be made with a long term view in mind, and that it may be necessary to make unpopular decisions which would benefit the discipline and allow it to continue to develop in a positive way. It would also be necessary to ensure that any changes were clear and easy for competitors to understand as an overly complex structure could be demotivating. Fairness and encouragement for all competitors were also considered to be key elements.
52. The discussion suggested that a system, applicable across all grades, be introduced which was proportional to the number of dogs in a class. However, for such a system to work, a centralised results database would be necessary.
53. It was necessary to agree whether a progression system should reward wins or consistency, noting that if the latter, caution was required to ensure that such consistency was achieved at a sufficiently high level such as second or third places. It was noted that many competitors enjoyed the status of having 'won out' of a class and after discussion, the Council agreed that a win-based format was necessary to achieve the desired pyramid structure and to maintain high standards in the higher grades. There was some support for the suggestion of 'half-wins' to be gained where the number of competitors in a class was below a certain level, although it was also highlighted that a low number of competitors in a class was not necessarily indicative of a low standard and that it would not be fair to penalise competitors where numbers were low.
54. The Council was thanked for its views which would be taken into account by the Grading Panel as part of its ongoing review of the grading structure.

ITEM 7. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE ACTIVITIES COMMITTEE

Use of external show management companies

55. The Activities Committee wished to seek the views of the Council regarding the use of external show management companies and whether the Kennel Club should have a formal procedure in place to

approve the use of external contractor to run shows on behalf of clubs with limited resources.

56. It was acknowledged that an increasing number of clubs were using such contractors. There was no intention from the Kennel Club to prevent them doing so, but it wished to assist show organisers to ensure that any such arrangements were made on a clear and professional basis. It was emphasised that where an external contractor was used, the responsibility for ensuring proper management of the show remained with the licence holder.
57. The Council was of the view that whilst it was helpful to provide guidance for those clubs wishing to use the services of an external contractor, it was not necessary for any formal procedure to approve them.
58. It was agreed that the key issues involved were those highlighted by the office, as follows:
 - Ensure cheques were made payable to the Club which held the licence for the show
 - Ensure adequate numbers of incident books were available for the number of different disciplines being run on one day i.e. breed & agility. These should be sent in by the Club/Show Secretary (if a Club member) subsequent to the show. Details were to be kept by the Club for any follow up queries
 - The schedule should indicate that the licensed Club was holding the show and not the Show Management company
 - Payments for services should be through the Club accounts
 - There should be a contract between the Club and the Show Management company
 - There should be a specific liaison between the Club and the Show Management company and Club should be involved in the process throughout
59. The Council was of the view that the entire document provided by the office should be published on the Kennel Club website as useful guidance for show organisers, with the proviso that it be reiterated that ultimate responsibility for proper management of the show remained with the licence holder.

Use of treat bags
60. Noting that there was no Regulation which prevented a competitor from carrying food in a treat bag whilst in the ring, the views of the Council were sought as to whether a treat bag should be considered to be an aid to the dog and if so, whether an amendment to the H Regulations regarding their use was necessary.
61. A discussion took place as to whether it was possible to amend existing Regulations to state that treat bags may not be taken into the ring, or

that training aids may not be used in the ring. If so, it would be necessary to provide a clear definition of what constituted a training aid, which could be problematic. Almost any item could potentially be used as a training aid and the Council did not consider it advisable to be prescriptive in respect of what items may or may not be worn by a competitor whilst in the ring.

62. The Council did not consider that a serious issue existed on this matter. However, it noted that the office received a number of queries as to whether or not it was considered acceptable for a competitor to wear a treat bag or similar item whilst in the ring and wished to seek guidance for the purposes of clarity.
63. It was agreed that a proposal may be submitted to the Council at its next meeting to the effect that the wearing of treat bags whilst in the ring should not be permissible. In the interim, the views of the agility community would be sought in order to assist the Council in its discussion of the matter.

ITEM 8. INTERNATIONAL AGILITY FESTIVAL

64. The Council noted a report on the arrangements for the Kennel Club International Agility Festival, due to be held at Rockingham Castle 10 - 13 August 2017. The venue had also been secured for 2018 and 2019.
65. The principle sponsor would once again be CSJ Specialist Canine Feeds, and the Kennel Club wished to note its gratitude for CSJ's continued support.
66. All Olympia Quarter-Finals and Semi-Finals would be held at the festival.
67. It was noted that the 'Border Collie Classic' event was due to take place shortly before the festival, as a result of which it was anticipated there would be an increase in the number of overseas competitors competing at the festival. In response to a query, it was confirmed that planning would take this into account and that the usual number of camping spaces would be available for UK competitors.

ITEM 9. AGILITY TEAM GB

68. The Council noted a report on Agility Team GB's attendance at the 2016 European Open Championships held 24–26 July 2016 in Calais, France and the World Championships held in Zaragoza, Spain held 22–25 September 2016.

ITEM 10. DISCUSSION ITEMS

Bitches in Season

69. Mrs Bay and Ms Bailey, represented by Mr Chandler, wished the Council to review Regulation H10c.(15), which stated that a schedule must contain 'a statement that no bitch in season is allowed to compete', and to consider whether it should be amended to allow for bitches in season to compete in some or all competitions held under Kennel Club Regulations.
70. Mrs Bay and Ms Bailey were of the view that agility should showcase the healthiest and fittest dogs and that bitches used for breeding often fell into this category, and that not allowing them to compete when in season limited their ability to compete at the highest levels. They also wished to emphasise the loss of effort, time and money invested by owners in training, competing, travel and event fees if a bitch was in season and unable to compete.
71. It was also noted that in many other countries, provision was made in agility competitions for in season bitches to compete.
72. The Council was requested to consider the four following options:
 - Option 1: to allow bitches in season to compete at all Kennel Club agility events
 - Option 2: to allow bitches in season to compete at major agility finals as determined by the Kennel Club
 - Option 3: to allow bitches in season to compete at major agility qualifiers and finals as determined by the Kennel Club
 - Option 4: to allow each show organising committee to determine if they wish to allow bitches in season to compete at their show/final/qualifier
73. Feedback from the agility community indicated a wide range of views on the issue. Some competitors were happy for bitches in season to compete at all Kennel Club agility events whilst others were of the view that bitches competing whilst in season would have a detrimental effect on dogs (whether entire or not) and on bitches present at a show, and therefore should not be permitted. Others were of the view that bitches in season should be allowed to compete under some circumstances, such as at major agility finals as determined by the Kennel Club or major agility semi-finals and finals as determined by the Kennel Club. The events affected would be Discover Dogs, Olympia, Crufts, and the International Agility Festival. It was highlighted that at a large event such as the festival, there may be difficulties in managing bitches in season which may be present in or around any of the rings which may cause problems for other handlers.

74. A vote took place and by a majority, the Council did not support bitches in season being permitted to compete at any Kennel Club agility events.

ITEM 11. FIVE YEAR STRATEGY

75. It was agreed that the Five Year Strategy should be given careful consideration to ensure that it provided clear long-term objectives for the future of agility. This would involve a number of stages:

- Identify who should be involved – involve those that can contribute
- SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)
- Prioritise issues to be addressed
- Set specific objectives –subject to SMART criteria (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-related).
- Produce a written strategic plan
- Monitor and review the strategic plan

76. It was anticipated that the Council could achieve its objectives more effectively by the use of a number of Panels, using the same format as the existing Equipment Panel and Grading Panel whereby a number of Council representatives carried out research with a view to providing detailed reports or proposals for further consideration by the Council.

77. Some objectives had already been achieved, or partially achieved, for example the introduction of Platinum and Diamond Agility warrants had provided recognition and reward for the achievements of competitors.

78. A number of suggestions were discussed

- Views about the quality of the Dogs in Championship classes
- People progressing too quickly
- Judges failing to judge correctly
- Course building/design and how it affected dogs
- Getting more top handlers to put something back into agility such as helping at shows, judging etc.
- Helpers at shows
- Agility Database
- Measuring
- Agility Governing Body
- Clarify rules/guidance/advice
- Optimum jump heights
- Decline of Kennel Club Registered Clubs
- Communications and relationships between the KC and ALC

79. After discussion and review of the above, it was agreed that three Panels, in addition to the existing Equipment and Grading Panels, should be set up in order to give detailed consideration to specific

issues. The proposed new Panels, their objectives, and their memberships were as follows:

Agility Governance Panel

To examine issues relating to show management, Regulations, and communications, and to consider ways in which the Council could be more effective in making decisions on behalf of the agility community.

Mr S Chandler
Mr M Cavill
Mrs J Gardner
Mr K Smith
Ms J Harker

Height Classification Panel

To consider issues relating to jump heights, including health and welfare issues, and to consider ways of determining optimum jump heights for all dogs dependent upon height and conformation. Also to consider issues related to dog heights and measuring.

Mrs P Baltes
Mrs Y Croxford
Mr M Cavill
Mr M Hallam
Mrs S Hawkswell

Judging Panel

To work in conjunction with the Activities Judges Working Party to consider any issues relating to judging, including competency and education – to include issues arising from Continuing Personal Development and Mentoring schemes

Mrs J Gardner
Mr C Huckle
Mrs L Olden

80. It was noted that it would be up to each Panel to arrange its own meetings, although communication may be carried out by email or by conference call where appropriate.

ITEM 12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

81. It was confirmed that it was not mandatory for the full postal address of a representative to be published in the Regulations booklet should a delegate wish, but details of a means of contact should be available.

ITEM 13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

82. It was noted that the Council's next meeting would take place on 13 July 2017. Any items for the agenda must be submitted by 14 April 2017.

The meeting closed at 3.10 pm

MR M CAVILL
Chairman

THE KENNEL CLUB'S MISSION STATEMENT

'The Kennel Club is the national body which exists to promote the general improvement, health and well-being of all dogs through responsible breeding and ownership'