

## **Health Testing and Screening – A Cornerstone of the ABS**

From the outset, the Assured Breeder Scheme has incorporated breed specific requirements and recommendations to follow, which relate to health and welfare issues, such as health testing of the sire and dam for various hereditary diseases prior to mating. The reasons why some are requirements and others are recommendations can be varied, but in reality there is an expectation that both should be completed. The difference comes in the way that these are policed; requirements are checked at the time a litter application is made, whilst recommendations are checked by the assessor at the time of an assessment visit and at random thereafter. All requirements are mandatory and all recommendations are expected to be completed unless a compelling and justifiable reason for non-compliance is provided.

The listings on the schedule are derived from requests from breed clubs who can, at any point, ask that these be changed; this provides breed clubs with the opportunity to help shape the Scheme and make sure it remains relevant to the breed. Information on the processes and procedures behind these changes, and how amendments or additions are made, can be found herewith.

### **What can be accepted as a breed specific requirement?**

All requirements are restricted to tests where an official Kennel Club scheme is in operation and therefore the results are already recorded by Kennel Club systems and published online on Mate Select. Automated checks are performed using Kennel Club records at the time of an Assured Breeder litter registration on both sire and dam. If a health test is not an official Kennel Club scheme, then results are not able to be recorded and it is not possible to complete automated checks to confirm that an Assured Breeder has been compliant. Therefore, health tests that cannot be accepted as an ABS requirement include DNA tests that are not yet official Kennel Club testing schemes and any breed club schemes and guidance.

Where a DNA test is a requirement, both parents must be tested and at least one parent must have tested 'clear' which ensures that none of the progeny will be affected for the condition.

New official Kennel Club testing schemes may be accepted as a recommendation, but should usually be in place for six months to one year before being upgraded to a requirement. This is to ensure that there are no issues with the reporting or validation of the test results.

### **What can be accepted as a breed specific recommendation?**

ABS health recommendations can include anything that impacts the health or welfare of the breeding dogs or subsequent puppies. Recommendations do not have to be part of an official Kennel Club scheme, and will not be automatically checked at the time of registration. However, they are expected to be conducted or followed and compliance will be checked by the Assessor who will expect to see a proof of compliance, such as health certificates etc., or will want to discuss the breeders' reasons for not complying. An important aim of setting out health screening recommendations is to raise the profile of existing breed club schemes and to increase awareness of newly emerging diseases or the prevalence of an existing condition within a breed. With more breeders carrying out testing, more data is available which allows researchers to develop a better picture of how each breed is affected by a particular disease, how best to improve the health of affected breeds and enables development of cheaper and faster testing methods.

### **Who can apply for a change?**

It is in the hands of the breed clubs, usually through the Breed Health Coordinator, to suggest which tests are appropriate. Breeds with only one club are usually expected to have the majority of their committee in agreement, whilst breeds with more than one club should ideally have the majority of

clubs in agreement with the request prior to submission. Where more than one club has agreed to a request, this must be demonstrated by the request being on behalf of the agreeing breed clubs and endorsed by the appropriate club secretaries. On occasions, the Kennel Club, through its Dog Health Group, will be required to make a decision on whether a test is appropriate if the breed clubs are in disagreement.

Breeds with more than one club that have not sought approval from their fellow clubs can do so via the Kennel Club, but this may delay the application. Once the opinions of the breed clubs have been compiled by the Kennel Club, there must be a majority agreement in order for the request to be taken further.

#### **Which form needs to be completed?**

Upon receiving an initial enquiry about making a request, a Breed Specific Development Request Form is sent by the office for completion (this is also available on our website available as a download on the right hand side of the ABS home page). This is used to collect any additional information necessary for the request to proceed, which includes the following:

- Which test should be added or changed
- The details of the requested change (i.e. adding a new recommendation, adding a new requirement, upgrading a recommendation to a requirement or downgrading a requirement to a recommendation)
- The reason for the requested change
- Any data, statistics or evidence which may support the request
- Who the request has been made by i.e. one breed club, a number of breed clubs or all clubs within a breed. If a request is on behalf of more than one club, the request must be endorsed by the secretaries of each named club

#### **What happens to completed Breed Specific Development Form?**

The completed Breed Specific Development Request Form and supporting evidence is presented at the next Assured Breeder Scheme Sub-Group meeting for discussion. The ABS Sub-Group meet three to four times a year and the date of the next meeting can be provided upon request. If a request is not submitted with sufficient time to process, it may not be discussed until the subsequent ABS Sub-Group meeting.

If the request is approved by the ABS Sub-Group, then the item will be raised at the next Dog Health Group Meeting and will then require final ratification by the KC Board (previously known as General Committee). If the request is not approved, reasons as to why the request was declined will be provided. On occasion, an application for a new requirement may not be accepted, but it may be considered that it would be suitable to add to the Schedule as a recommendation with a view to reconsider the decision in 6 to 12 months.

Where a request is approved, changes are made to the ABS Breed Specific Requirements and Recommendations Schedule in January and July each year. As with all changes to the Scheme, existing members have a six month period of grace before compliance is compulsory to take account of any existing breeding plans.

Any breed clubs wishing to make enquiries or submit a request should contact the ABS Team on: [abs@thekennelclub.org.uk](mailto:abs@thekennelclub.org.uk)