



Royal Kennel Club

RKC Nose-to-Tail Veterinary Assessment FAQs

What is the Nose-to-Tail Veterinary Assessment?

As part of the new [Breeding for Health Framework](#), which groups breeds that share certain issues so targeted support can be provided and breed communities can share relevant experience and expertise, the Royal Kennel Club has committed to deliver, in close collaboration with both vets and breeders, key projects to help tackle each of the following areas: genetic diversity, conformation and breed-related disease.

One of these projects is the development of a Nose-to-Tail Veterinary Assessment for visible conformation. Dogs require healthy body shapes to support their welfare, and breeders need practical tools to help them make informed and responsible breeding decisions. This new evidence-based and veterinary-led assessment will be suitable for all dogs but particularly intended to assess and monitor conformational traits that may be associated with welfare concerns.

What is our approach to its development?

The development of the RKC Nose-to-Tail Visual Assessment builds on many years of prior work and is being shaped through consultation with both veterinary and breeder stakeholder groups. Initial veterinary workshops have now ended, and the breeder workshops are scheduled for the end of March.

The veterinary advisory group has completed the initial selection of assessment criteria. These will then be reviewed by the breeder focus groups. The assessment will be trialled over the summer and refined in response to feedback from these pilots, with the aim of launching it by the end of 2026.

How were breed representatives selected for the breeder workshops?

All communications relating to the development of the Nose-to-Tail Veterinary Assessment were initially shared with all Breed Health Coordinators (BHCs), who are responsible for communicating with their wider breed community and coordinating representation at relevant meetings, such as these workshops. BHCs were advised that once attendance was confirmed, breed club secretaries would be informed of those attending these initial, focused sessions on behalf of their breed. For those breeds where we did not receive a nomination from the BHC, the opportunity to nominate a representative(s) was extended directly to the relevant breed clubs.

The workshops are as follows:

- Workshop 1: Wednesday 18 March, 11:00am to 1:00pm
- Workshop 2: Monday 23 March, 7:00pm to 9:00pm
- Workshop 3: Wednesday 25 March, 7:00pm to 9:00pm
- Workshop 4: Tuesday 31 March, 2:00pm to 4:00pm

Although these workshops are of particular interest to breeds with body shape features sometimes considered extreme (for example, those that may be highlighted through the All-Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare's Innate Health Assessment), the assessment is intended to be suitable for all dogs, therefore it is important that a wide range of breeds are represented.

What is the Innate Health Assessment and was the RKC involved in its development?

The Innate Health Assessment (IHA) launched in November 2025 and was developed by the All-Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare. It is currently intended as a self-assessment for breeders and puppy buyers, using 10 criteria with 8/10 being required for a pass.

We, at the RKC, share the IHA principle that every dog should have a healthy body shape that allows a good quality of life. RKC were involved during the consultation for the IHA, but not with its final development. RKC did not choose the individual criteria or the pass-fail format and therefore, although we think that the IHA has clear value as a tool to raise awareness and reach the dogs that are not RKC registered, we think that our communities need a more structured tool to support breeding away from extreme conformation. That's why we're developing the Nose-to-Tail Veterinary Assessment that will look at the visible conformation of the whole dog. It's intended to be applicable to any breed with one standard format, but we're not expecting or recommending that it should be used for every dog given that some breeds will have no concerns at all in terms of visual conformation.

How does the Nose-to-Tail Veterinary Assessment differ from the Innate Health Assessment?

The RKC's Nose-to-Tail Veterinary Assessment, initiated in early 2025, builds on more than a decade of work through the Breed Health & Conservation Plans. However, recent external developments towards the end of 2025, such as the All-Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare's Innate Health Assessment (IHA), have made this work more important than ever. Developed in collaboration with veterinarians and breeders, particularly those representing breeds most likely to be affected, the Nose-to-Tail Veterinary Assessment will sit alongside the independent IHA and will support ongoing improvement through data collection.

APGAW are supportive of the RKC developing the Nose-to-Tail Veterinary Assessment. Central to this is an agreement from APGAW to meet with the RKC, and a carefully selected panel of representatives from the breeding community, and review the current criteria based on evidence, which support improved canine welfare. For more information about the RKC and APGAW Dog Health Action Plan

please visit: <https://www.royalkennelclub.com/about-us/resources/media-centre/2026/february/rkc-and-apgaw-announce-plan-to-prioritise-dog-welfare-and-find-a-workable-solution-to-protect-pedigree-breeder-community/>

What is included in the RKC Nose-to-Tail Veterinary Assessment?

It is only concerned with body shape and movement, not colour or coat type. Those can be addressed later in subsequent workstreams if needed. Similarly, it's simply a visual and manual assessment of body shape. Therefore, it does not include or replace other appropriate health screening (e.g. DNA testing, hip scoring, elbow grading, eye testing, BOAS testing).

What is the grading system?

There are currently 15 criteria, although this may change during development. Some features will be assessed visually and others measured, and where possible, each will be graded from 0 to 3 (0 being normal and 3 being the most extreme). Grades will be added together to create a total score for each dog. For example, if there were 15 criteria and they were all graded 0-3, the minimum score that a dog could achieve would be 0 and the maximum would be 45. This means that you can then allow comparison of the total score between dogs and allow the creation of a breed average that could then be compared over time and between breeds.

At this stage, there is no expectation that all dogs of all breeds should have an overall score of 0. Many grade 1s will indicate acceptable variation that's not a welfare problem, but describes normal breed conformation for dogs of breeds with body shapes that are more exaggerated. What scores are okay will become apparent during the pilot process. The pilot process will also help us decide when some criteria are too difficult to measure repeatably.

We have deliberately designed it without a pass-fail format, because we want it to be something that can shift over time and compare dogs within a breed and between breeds, rather than being a rigid one-size-fits-all result.

Which breeds is it applicable to?

The RKC Nose-to-Tail Veterinary Assessment is intended to be suitable for all dogs regardless of breed. However, we expect that the assessment will be particularly relevant for breeds that have previously been identified as potentially having conformational traits that may be associated with welfare concerns.

At what age are dogs expected to have an assessment, and will this need to be repeated as the dog matures?

We're intending it to be a one-time check that's done pre-breeding in adult dogs and one of the things that remains to be decided is what the minimum age should be

because that might vary from one breed to another. Feedback and suggestions on this point are very welcome.

What other opportunities are there to support its development?

We will be offering further consultation opportunities following the workshops, which will be open to all, and we encourage anyone interested to register [here](#).

Where are we in terms of the assessment development process, and what are the next steps following the workshops?

We've completed the veterinary phase of consultation and are now moving into the breeder phase of consultation, with over 200 breeders from over 150 breeds signed up to the upcoming workshops.

As we are holding four workshops over a couple of weeks, it is likely that the discussion process will evolve during this period, since we can use feedback from earlier sessions to modify what we cover in later sessions. Following these discussion workshops, we will be finalising the draft criteria, deciding grade boundaries (with support from various veterinary sources) and writing the formal description of the draft assessment evidence base, format and process. We will then move into a practical development stage, which will include various pilot sessions over the summer, at dog shows and elsewhere, followed by further feedback and appropriate revisions as needed. Following the pilot phase, we will develop a final version for implementation, which we plan to launch in November 2026.

Who is included in the veterinary focus group?

Overall, 23 vets have so far contributed to the development of the provisional Nose-to-Tail assessment criteria, all volunteering their time to support the project. Most of them are in general practice, but some work in referral practice and/or universities, including three professors. Three-quarters of the vets involved in the main focus group have shown dogs themselves, and two-thirds of them have bred dogs, with personal experience between them of breeding dogs across all seven show groups. Many are also judges, show vets, and/or involved in other canine activities.

Are there any particular challenges that you would like breeder feedback on?

The vets involved in this project have all agreed that movement is an important factor to assess conformation. However, there is a difference between temporary lameness and permanent unsoundness that's an inherent part of the dog's conformation. The other challenge is that the assessing vets won't all have breed specific knowledge. For these reasons, whilst grading movement is challenging, it was agreed that it would be sensible to include it in the assessment in some way. Options are to include movement in the comments section of the form or to have a division between soundness and unsoundness. Feedback and suggestions are very welcome.

Another challenge is that not all criteria will have the same welfare impact. Again, we welcome feedback on how to recognise this within the assessment.

Will the Nose-to-Tail Veterinary Assessment affect dog showing?

We will need to look at breed standards where there's obvious incompatibilities and this will need to feed into our guidance for judges.