

MINUTES OF THE KENNEL CLUB AGILITY LIAISON COUNCIL MEETING
HELD ON 20 JANUARY 2011

PRESENT:

| | |
|---------------|----------------------------|
| Mr D Ray | Midlands |
| Mr R McAleese | Northern Ireland |
| Mr I Mallabar | North East |
| Mrs J Nero | North East |
| Mrs P Baltés | North West |
| Mr M Hallam | North West |
| Ms M Kelly | Scotland |
| Mr S Chandler | South East and East Anglia |
| Mr J Gilbert | South East and East Anglia |
| Mr T Griffin | South and South West |
| Miss L Olden | South and South West |

IN ATTENDANCE:

| | |
|----------------|-------------------------------------|
| Mr S Ford | Chairman – Activities Sub-Committee |
| Miss D Deuchar | Team Leader – WTOA |
| Miss J Nosalik | WTOA Specialist |

IN THE CHAIR: Mr D Ray

ITEM 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1. Apologies had been received from Mr R Jordan, representing the Midlands and Mr M Shaw, representing Wales.

ITEM 2. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

2. The minutes of the meeting held on 17 June 2010 were signed by the Chairman as an accurate record.

ITEM 3. MATTERS ARISING

Results of Recommendations

3. The Council noted the following matters which had been approved by the General Committee at its meeting on 12 October 2010:
 - i. New Kennel Club Official Measurers for Agility.
 - ii. Set Measuring Fee – it was confirmed that the standard measuring fee from 1 January 2011 was to be £4.00.
 - iii. Agility Grading Review – Mr Jordan has since resigned from the Working Party due to work commitments.

International Agility Teams

4. The Chairman praised Mr S Croxford, World Championships Team Manager, and Mr G Partridge, European Open Team Manager, for their commitment and hard work to the International Agility Teams. It was highlighted that both teams had represented the Kennel Club to a high standard.
5. It was announced that with great regret the Kennel Club would no longer be hosting the European Open Championships in 2012 because it was not a member of the FCI. The Council was disappointed with the FCI's decision as it felt that the Kennel Club would have hosted the event to a high standard.

ITEM 4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE ACTIVITIES SUB-COMMITTEE

Agility Code of Ethics

6. The Council expressed its views on the document and recommended it for approval. It was noted that competitors were pleased that the Code placed emphasis on handler behaviour. Some areas had requested that competitors be allowed to use practice areas prior to competing. Following discussion the Council agreed that this was not acceptable.
7. Despite discussing the title at its previous meeting, the Council decided that "Agility Code of Conduct" was preferable and **recommended** the new title and document for approval. It was noted that the document would be available on the Kennel Club website once approved.

ITEM 5. FIVE YEAR STRATEGY

Dfs Crufts Agility Teams

8. The Council was invited to discuss the topics from the five year strategy and a discussion took place as to how to ensure that dfs Crufts Agility Teams comprised of competitors from the same registered club. There were concerns that membership of national clubs would be difficult to validate and that there could be problems for small and medium dog teams due to a lack of members at a particular club. The office stated that upon qualifying, each entry was checked to ensure each team belonged to a registered club that had an interest in agility. The objective was for teams to prove they contributed to the club they represented, yet it was acknowledged that there were also numerically smaller geographic areas to consider. It was reiterated that the matter only needed to be verified for exceptional circumstances where possible teams falsely claimed to belong to the same club.

Guidelines to Assist Course Design

9. It was acknowledged that there was a lack of clarity in what was expected for course designs at each grade. As a result, it sometimes led to inappropriate course design for a particular grade. Guidelines rather than regulations were welcomed by the regions. It was also suggested that a mentoring system for first time judges be considered. The Council referred this matter to the Agility Accredited Trainers Seminar for consideration.
 10. Many possible factors were noted as to why there might be a lower standard of judging. This included the pass mark for the judges' examination paper being too low, judging at non-Kennel Club agility shows could confuse judges and judges being incapable of making strong decisions, fearful of a negative reaction from competitors. It was also stated that new judges were often given grade 1 or 2 classes as their first appointment(s) which could arguably be more difficult to judge than the higher grades. However, the Council agreed that many existing judges were not judging at the expected standard either.
 11. It was stressed that there was a distinction between good course design and competency of good judging, the latter being a greater problem since course design would always suit some competitors and not others. As a result, the Council decided not to take any further action in creating guidelines and leaving the matter of course design to the judge's discretion.
- #### Championship Classes / Combined Classes / Grading Structure
12. The Council deferred the above matters to the Grading Structure Review Working Party's February meeting for further discussion.

ITEM 6. PROPOSALS FROM SOCIETIES/PRIVATE INDIVIDUALS

- #### Proposed Amendment of Regulation H(1)(B)3.k (Weaving Poles)
13. Mr Chandler, on behalf of Mr Jolly, a private individual, proposed the amendment of the above regulation. Mr Griffin seconded the proposal. A discussion took place over the reason for the amendment, including whether there was a health and safety risk for dogs and the fact that it was the only remaining obstacle not to be standardised. It was widely accepted that there was no evidence to suggest that differences in the distance between poles was a safety risk to dogs travelling at greater speeds. However, there was much support for standardising the distance between the poles for the sake of consistency. Additionally, the majority agreed that alternate base supports would be beneficial for dogs to prevent potential injury to their paws.

14. A few members questioned the need for the amendment, whether it was actually necessary or more for convenience. Concerns were raised that standardising the equipment might impose great costs to manufacturers. The office stated that it would seek equipment specifications from manufacturers so that it could clarify the average dimensions used. However, it was reiterated that any change should benefit the dog.
15. There was some confusion as to where the precise measurement between the weaving poles would be, and whether the base distances had been taken into account. Furthermore, it was queried whether the weave pole width itself required standardising, and therefore, the proposal would require further definition. Consequently, the Council requested that two proposals be written, the first to reflect the distance between the poles and the pole width, and a second to propose alternate base supports, to be included on June's agenda.
16. New Regulation H(1)(B)3.m (Equipment Sizes in Special Classes)
Mr Ray, on behalf of Ms Brown, a private individual, proposed a regulation to define equipment sizes in special classes. Mr Chandler seconded the proposal. The Council had mixed views on this proposal, mainly because it applied to all special classes and it was highlighted that certain special classes such as "ABC classes" should not have the equipment altered. It was agreed that the wording should be altered to specify that certain classes, such as "Veterans" and "Allsorts", may have lowered equipment. The office was requested to re-word the proposal for the June meeting.

ITEM 7. DISCUSSION ITEMS

17. Introduction of a Fourth Hurdle Height – Standard
The Council discussed the possibility of introducing a fourth hurdle height at 550mm, "Standard", on behalf of Mrs Layphries. The Council gave feedback from its areas, however, there was a lack of support as it might eventually lead to an introduction of another height such as "Micro". It was stressed that the large height had already been lowered once before and competitors were unlikely to want further changes at this time.
18. The Council did not support the proposal agreeing that a dog's fitness to jump current heights should be more important than introducing a fourth hurdle height. It was further queried whether the medium dog height should be altered instead of introducing a fourth height, but it was expected that medium classes would then become another collie dominated category. The costs for show societies and manufacturers were also considered. The majority of the Council voted against the introduction of a fourth hurdle height, emphasising that the matter centred on fit dogs more than anything else.

Release of Show Schedules

19. On behalf of Hinckley Dog Training Society the Council briefly discussed whether there was a need to release show schedules at a set time. It was felt that this issue had arisen as a result of the problems surrounding camping at shows, and therefore, was a club matter. It was suggested that societies could consider releasing their schedules prior to taking camping bookings. It was unanimously agreed that this matter was an internal club issue.

Championship Class Format – Two Rounds

20. The Council discussed an idea to alter the Championship Class format, submitted by Mrs Wingate-Wynne. There were mixed views on a format where the combined result of the agility and jumping round would determine the winner, without the need for a final. It was noted that this format would encourage competitors to work both rounds equally. Currently, should a competitor be eliminated from the first round, they would be more likely to “train” in the second round. The biggest concern was that with the removal of the third round, the spectacle of the final would be lost.
21. It was suggested that the standard of dogs in the Championship Class could be improved if Grade 7 competitors were required to qualify to be eligible to enter the class. The Council agreed that a review of the Championship Class was needed and referred the matter to the Agility Grading Structure Review Working Party.

Championship Class Format – Winner of each Round to Qualify for Final

22. The Council discussed another suggestion for a new Championship Class format, submitted by Mr Sandercock. It was understood that should a competitor gain faults in the first round, there would still be an incentive to run the second round competitively since the winner would be guaranteed a place in the final. This could reduce the problem of “training” in the second round. However, the winner of the first round would naturally have an opportunity to “train” in the second round if their place in the final was secured. The Council opposed taking any further action at this time, but welcomed suggestions for how the current Championship Class format could be improved upon.

Running Orders – Options 1, 2 and 3

23. A lengthy discussion took place regarding each of the suggested running order options and how to ensure competitors ran as close to their running order as possible. The discussion included whether there was a need for a regulation because of a minority who “work the system” to their advantage. It was stressed that competitors should keep to their running orders when possible, as a matter of courtesy, and it was suggested whether some wording should be placed in the “Agility Code of Conduct”.

24. The Council urged competitors to have the courage to speak out when such situations arise. It was requested that a press release be published to highlight this matter and the ensuing consequences, and that clubs needed further clarity on how to deal with such situations at their shows. The Council agreed that an amendment to regulations would be considered at its next meeting.

Grading Structure Review

25. The Council discussed what issues had arisen as a result of the current grading system that would require further review at the Agility Grading Structure Review Working Party at its February meeting. Topics of concern included the apparent bottleneck in large grade 3 and 6 classes, and that it was too easy to progress up to grade 6, especially for small and medium dogs in numerically low geographic areas.
26. Suggestions for the Working Party to consider included requiring more agility wins to progress between certain grades, as well as raising the number of points required to progress. Another idea was that handlers progressing from grade 2 could omit grade 3 and be placed straight into grade 4, whilst new dogs with experienced handlers would continue to begin in grade 3, thus reducing the bottleneck.
27. A great deal of emphasis was placed on course times, stressing that they were too relaxed, and courses should be correctly measured and calculated. The Council supported this need and proposed a document be produced for judges. It was agreed that the matter should be discussed at the Judges Working Party in April and brought back for further discussion at June's meeting.

Vet on Site

28. Mr Chandler requested the Council discuss the possibility of having a vet on site at an agility show. It was unanimously agreed that information for local vets was already provided on the schedule, but it was the societies' discretion whether to have a vet present at all times or not. No further action was taken.

ITEM 8. INTERNATIONAL AGILITY FESTIVAL

29. Mr Ray gave a verbal report on arrangements for the Kennel Club International Agility Festival to be held at Kelmarsh Hall on 12-14 August 2011. It was noted that there would probably be 17 rings and that there would be an amended layout for the trade stands and show official area. The Chairman also praised Mr Rodgers' dedication and hard work to the show layout.

ITEM 9. JUDGES WORKING PARTY (WTOA)

30. Mr Chandler gave a verbal report on the progress of the Judges Working Party and advised the Council that the Annual Accredited Trainers' Seminar had been postponed to October. This would enable the trainers to explain any regulation changes, due to be implemented in January the following year, at the beginning of the seminar season. Mr Chandler also expressed the concern of the Judges Working Party regarding the judges' dress code. It was stressed that judges should dress in a smart manner, weather conditions permitting, that would command respect from competitors.

ITEM 10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Insertion of New Regulation - H27.a

31. The Chairman informed the Council of a new regulation to take effect from 1 January 2012. The new regulation will allow for any awards given by a judge to a dog, handled by their spouse or immediate family resident at their address, to be disqualified. The Council unanimously opposed the introduction of this regulation and was disappointed that a decision was made without consultation. It was reported that there had been considerable negative comment at regional meetings and some judges considered it unnecessary to regulate to protect their integrity.
32. The Chairman of the Activities Sub-Committee, Mr Ford, explained the reasoning for the new regulation. He stated that such practice was the norm in every sport, he acknowledged that the timing was unfortunate, but stressed that a decision needed to be made to protect its reputation for the future.
33. The Council requested more input in future decisions that would affect the discipline of agility. It was confirmed that the matter would be further discussed by the Activities Sub-Committee (ASC) at its meeting in March. The council was unanimous in asking the ASC to reconsider this decision due to the unique circumstances in the sport and the strength of opinion against the Regulation from agility competitors, judges and show societies. The Council requested that if the Kennel Club was not prepared to withdraw the Regulation, it would at least consider restricting it to Championship judges only for the agility discipline.

Training Rounds

34. A concern was raised regarding the problem of competitors "training" in the ring. It was stated that it was a difficult area to manage although the Council reiterated that practice was not condoned once under test. It was accepted that a competitor had paid to run in that particular class and that it was quicker to let them complete their run. Since it was too difficult to define what constituted "training" in the ring, it was agreed not to take any further action at this time.

Quality Control on Measurers

35. Miss Olden requested the Council consider whether there was a need to conduct some quality control on existing Measurers. The Council saw no objection in looking into the situation, but stated that random spot checking could create more problems. Miss Olden welcomed suggestions and the Council agreed to defer the matter to its next meeting.

ITEM 11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

36. The date of the next meeting will be Thursday 23 June 2011. Items for the agenda should reach the office by Friday 25 March 2011.

There being no further matters to discuss the meeting closed at 15:20pm.

D RAY
Chairman

Agility Liaison Council Representatives
1 January 2010 – 31 December 2012

Listed below are the Area Liaison Council Representatives that can be contacted should further information be required on any of the items included on the minutes.

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