

Complying with the 'Fit to Breed' assessment in dog breeding legislation in England and Wales

Summary

When asked to provide a 'fit to breed' assessment a veterinary surgeon should consider the following to inform their examination:

- Confirming the identity of the dog from its microchip number
- Undertaking a physical examination to detect any conformation defects
- Checking and recording body condition score and body weight
- Requesting from the breeder a full clinical history from all the veterinary practices that have treated the dog to ensure no surgical procedures have been undertaken to alter conformation. This should be requested in advance
- It is the breeder's responsibility to fully declare all treatment and they should provide a written and signed declaration that they have done so. See **Annex A** for example declaration
- Assessing whether the dog is demonstrating excessive nervousness or aggression, which may indicate the need to review socialisation programmes at the breeding establishment
- What [BVA/KC Health Schemes](#) should have been used and evaluate the results relative to breed medians
- What DNA tests are appropriate for the breed (or breeds when examining a cross-bred or 'designer' dog) as set out by [the Kennel Club](#) and on the [Dog Breed Health website](#)
- Whether DNA test results should restrict the dog to breeding to a particular group such as a 'clear' dog
- Guidance on conformation and breeding decisions as set out in [the CFSG Guidance on dog conformation](#)
- Veterinary surgeons should not generally provide certificates for their clients' dogs because of the potential conflict of interest.

Legislative requirements

Legislation in England (the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018) and Wales (the Animal Welfare (Breeding of Dogs) (Wales) Regulations 2014) both require the health and welfare of breeding animals to be considered by the licence holder. The England legislation is most specific and says in Schedule 6, condition 6(5):

"No dog may be kept for breeding if it can reasonably be expected, on the basis of its genotype, phenotype or state of health that breeding from it could have a detrimental effect on its health or welfare or the health or welfare of its offspring."

In Wales it is normal practice for all breeding dogs to be examined annually by a veterinary surgeon to assess their breeding potential along similar lines.

The role of the veterinary surgeon

It is likely that a veterinary surgeon will be consulted by either the local authority or the breeder to provide an assessment of the suitability of breeding stock to be bred from. This advice is aimed at informing veterinary surgeons being asked to assess animals of the parameters required. Veterinary surgeons should not generally provide certificates for their clients' dogs because of the potential conflict of interest.

A general health check including body condition score should be the starting point as this is likely to show up obvious inherited or conformation issues such as entropion/ectropion, heart murmur or excessive respiratory effort as a result of BOAS. It would also allow the veterinary surgeon to consider the potential effect of breeding on a bitch such as increased liability to eclampsia in a bitch with a low body condition score. Veterinary surgeons should clearly date their assessment to make clear when it was undertaken.

It is not the task of the veterinary surgeon to consider whether a breeding animal complies with any standard such as a Kennel Club Breed Standard. The dog should not be passed fit for breeding where the veterinary surgeon considers that any conformation issue deleterious to health or welfare is likely to be inherited and consequently passed on to any puppies. Any animal that has required surgical correction of any defect that may be inherited must not be used for breeding.

Appropriate tests

The advising veterinary surgeon should also consider what other tests may be appropriate for the breed of dog presented. Guidance on the genetic tests for each breed is available on the [Kennel Club Breed A-Z](#) webpages. Tests are listed as “Priority” and therefore mandated for the Kennel Club Assured Breeder Scheme, and strongly advised for all other breeders. It would be reasonable for these to be recommended tests in the Fit to Breed assessment. Further tests are listed as “Recommended” and others as “Advised”. The assessing veterinary surgeon should review the evidence of their Health and Welfare Report and list the tests expected against each dog. Where, for example, a known condition was apparent in a breeding line, that test should be additionally recommended for future breeding stock. It would be expected that breeders aiming for the Higher Standard, would be expected to carry out a more comprehensive testing regime.

Additional advice on what tests are appropriate for each breed is available from the [Dog Breed Health website](#).

A cross-bred or so-called ‘designer’ dog should have the tests appropriate for the source breeds. If a breed is listed or the dog is called a dual breed (eg. Cavishon, Labradoodle etc), it should be required to have both breed tests applied. If greater than a dual breed, it should be called a crossbreed and no pretesting mandated although the assessing veterinary surgeon could mandate testing or the breeder could still choose to test. For crossbreeds a check should be made of the breed history to ensure there have not been close matings e.g. father/daughter or grandfather/granddaughter.

The tests fall into two categories: physical tests and DNA-based tests. The most common physical tests are those run by [the BVA/Kennel Club Health Schemes and include hip dysplasia, elbow dysplasia and hereditary eye disease](#). All the appropriate BVA/KC tests are included in the websites given above. Although some tests are pass/fail, others give a more nuanced evaluation such as a hip score which should be taken into account in relation to the breed average taken from the Kennel Club site and other assessment of the dog. Read more on the detail of [the Canine Health Schemes](#).

There is large range of DNA tests available and most are specific to particular breeds as noted on both websites quoted above. Not all are well validated and care should be taken in proposing which tests should be undertaken. A veterinary surgeon being consulted on suitability to breed should be expected to request copies of any DNA tests which have been performed and advise on the results. For example, using a Homozygous recessive mutation, a homozygous affected dog should not be bred from and a homozygous clear dog could be mated to any dog. Heterozygous dogs should only be mated to a homozygous clear dog and a suitable comment to that effect should be made on the dog’s record.

After the evaluation outlined above the veterinary surgeon should be able to provide an opinion on the dog’s fitness to breed to comply with the legislation. Any certificate should include a description of the dog and its microchip number.

CFSG Guidance on Dog Conformation

The Canine and Feline Sector Group (CFSG) has developed [Guidance on Dog Conformation](#) to educate, inform and improve public awareness about dog conformation and its impact on dogs and wider society. It supports the Regulations relating to breeding and provides practical guidance for anyone breeding, selling or buying a dog whether for the purpose of further breeding or as a domestic pet. It highlights some of the key conformational aspects to look for in a dog when making decisions on whether to breed from or acquire a dog.



Companion Animal
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When making fit to breed assessments, veterinary surgeons should consider this guidance in conjunction with the legislation and its related guidance to inform whether or not they think a dog should be bred from.

Annex A – Example treatment declaration for breeders

I confirm I have disclosed all known clinical history including any veterinary treatment relating to [insert dog's name and microchip number].

..... (printed name)

..... (signed)

[dd/mm/yyyy] (dated)