



Bridging the Gap

Breeding for Health and Well-being



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MVB BSc(hons) GPCert(SAP) GPCert(FelP) GPCert(Derm) GPCert(B&PS) PGCertVetEd FHEA MSc(VetEpi) PhD FRCVS

**"Stop and think before acquiring a
dog with extreme conformation"**

Virtual Dog Health Forum – 'Bridging the Gap' – 3rd & 4th June 2025



Mäki, K., Llewellyn-Zaidi, A., St. Louis, D., Ralsky, M., O'Neill, D.G., Hedhammar, Å., Packer, R.M.A., Ekenstedt, K.J., Bell, J.S., Murphy, B., Seath, I.J., Courtin, A., Montonen, M., Nygård, A. and Reunanen, V. (2025) 'Moving from information and collaboration to action: report from the 5th International Dog Health Workshop in Helsinki, June 2024', *Companion Animal Health and Genetics*, 12(1), 2, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1186/s40575-025-00143-0>.

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Companion Animal Health and Genetics

REVIEW **Open Access**

Moving from information and collaboration to action: report from the 5th International Dog Health Workshop in Helsinki, June 2024

Katariina Mäki^{1*}, Aimee Llewellyn-Zaidi¹, David St. Louis¹, Marc Ralsky¹, Dan G. O'Neill², Åke Hedhammar³, Rowena M.A. Packer², Kari J. Ekenstedt⁴, Jerold S. Bell⁵, Becky Murphy⁶, Ian J. Seath⁷, Ambre Courtin⁸, Mirikka Montonen^{9,10}, Anna Nygård¹¹ and Vilma Reunanen¹²

Abstract
Background The International Partnership for Dogs, together with a rotating national host organisation, holds approximately biennial meetings called the International Dog Health Workshop (IDHW). These workshops bring together a broad range of stakeholders in dog health and welfare, including scientists and veterinary practitioners, to improve the international sharing of information and resources, to provide a forum for ongoing collaboration, and to identify and agree on specific needs and actions to improve canine health and welfare.
Workshop presentation 5th International Dog Health Workshop was hosted by the Finnish Kennel Club in Helsinki, Finland, in June 2024. The workshop was structured around four key issues facing those working to improve dog health: 'Supply and Demand', 'Breeding for Health and Well-Being', 'Big Data', and 'Does the Colour Matter? Defining Breed vs. Variety'. The workshop provided an opportunity for participants to meet face-to-face after a five-year hiatus due to COVID-19, on the 10th anniversary of the International Partnership for Dogs. Among the 106 decision-makers from 16 countries who attended the workshop, there was broad agreement on several issues during the discussions, such as following the scientific evidence on canine genetics and health, moving away from extreme conformation, and using all available tools, including crossbreeding, to maintain and increase genetic variation within dog breeds. It was agreed that these principles should become priorities for welfare-minded organisations at the national and international levels. Better education of puppy buyers, breeders, show judges, and other relevant parties was recurrently identified as a priority across all four themes of the workshop.
Conclusions In summary, key agreements from the 5th IDHW were that organisations must comply fully with relevant national animal welfare legislation, that organisations must work to eliminate extreme conformations from all dogs and to improve and maintain genetic diversity within subpopulations of dogs, and that organisations should recognise and support crossbreeding as an accepted and valuable tool for modern dog breeding.
Keywords International Dog Health Workshop, International Partnership for Dogs, Dog health, Canine health and well-being, Canine genetics

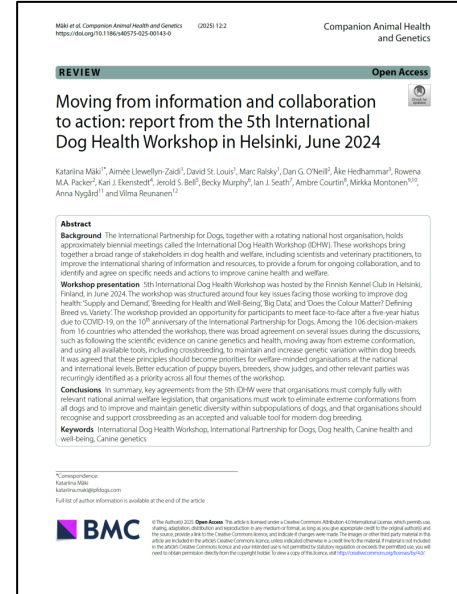
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Breeding for Health and Well-being – The Big Issues Identified

- ✦ The COVID-19 pandemic
 - ✦ Increased the demand for dogs: **Still ongoing high demand?**
 - ✦ Changed puppy buying behaviours: **What are these like now?**
 - ✦ More behavioural problems due to poor socialisation: **What are these like now?**
- ✦ Cost-of-living crisis - basic dog husbandry, feeding: **Getting worse? Why produce sick dogs?**
- ✦ Escalating prices of veterinary care: **Getting worse? Why produce sick dogs?**



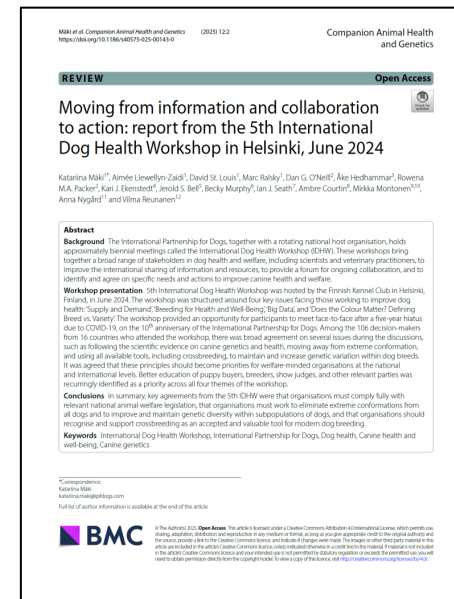
Breeding for Health and Well-being – Some more Big Issues Identified

- ✦ Illegal dog producers and suppliers: **Is this resolved?**
- ✦ Deliberately production of ‘homeless’ dogs for ‘rescue’: **Still ongoing?**
- ✦ Legislation:
 - ✦ Calls for new animal welfare legislation: **What has happened since?**
 - ✦ Calls for better enforcement of existing animal welfare legislation: **Actions?**
- ✦ Effective protection of dog health from extreme conformations associated with poor welfare: **Who is doing what to end this practice?**

The list of issues with dog health and welfare are endless!!

Extreme conformation took up half of the entire section in the paper!!!

“Stop and think before acquiring a dog with extreme conformation”



Breeding for Health and Well-being: Actions laid out in IDHW 2025

- ✦ It is imperative that the welfare and lives of dogs are prioritised in all canine activities. Discussions need to continue, but the solutions improving canine health and welfare need to be found urgently.
- ✦ Kennel clubs need to communicate better and more forcefully with their judges to make them understand their role and responsibility in protecting the health and welfare of all breeds.
- ✦ More effective education and understanding within puppy buyers, breeders, and show judges is needed to ensure research and evidence are put at the heart of the action.
- ✦ All stakeholders who care about dogs should strive to be champions of canine health and welfare first and then to consider how this relates to maintaining existing breed concepts.

Extreme conformation

- ✦ Health and wellbeing
 - ✦ Still fit for purpose
 - ✦ What reforms are needed
 - ✦ Has 'health testing' been implemented
 - ✦ Relevance for the future
- ✦ Why is **extreme conformation** a problem
 - ✦ Have the public been educated
 - ✦ Where are the 'hotspots'
 - ✦ Who is (should be) responsible
 - ✦ Role of legislation
- ✦ Surely limited **genetic diversity**
 - ✦ Acknowledge the problem
 - ✦ Opening breed registers
 - ✦ Outcrossing and genetic rescue



the paper!!!

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for over a century

ormation?

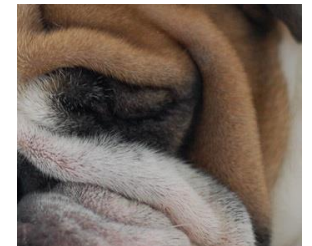
Extreme Conformation



International Collaborative on
Extreme Conformations in Dogs

Extreme conformation describes a physical appearance that has been so significantly altered by humankind away from the ancestral natural canine appearance that affected animals commonly suffer from poor health and welfare, with negative impacts on their quality and quantity of life.

International Collaboration for Extreme Conformation in Dogs



Why are we where we are with extreme conformation in Dogs?

Human Health: **The Human Model of Disease**

Health is an absence of all disease or infirmity

Solution: Old style 'Health testing'

Works well for disease that is stable

Defending dogs against the effects of life

Everyone is on board



Canine health also needs: **The Innate Health Model of Disease**

Health requires the genetic and physical capacity to have complete well-being

Solution: Innate Health Assessment

Works well for disease design

Defending dogs against the effects of humans

The ship is scarily empty

- DNA test: hereditary cataracts
- BVA/KC Elbow Dysplasia Scheme
- BVA/KC/ISDS Eye Scheme
- BVA/KC Hip Dysplasia Scheme
- BOAS: KC RFGS

'INNATE HEALTH'

All animals, regardless of type and breed, should be capable of performing all the typical activities necessary for their wellbeing within the anatomical, physiological and behavioural evolutionary norms for the species and the animal's stage of life .

Dan O'Neill, RVC

INNATE HEALTH: Capacity for Natural Activities

Some examples:

- ✦ **Breathe freely** and oxygenate fully without effort at rest and with exercise.
- ✦ **Blink fully.**
- ✦ **Maintain body temperature** within a normal physiological range for the species.
- ✦ **Move freely** without conformation-related impediment.
- ✦ **Eat and drink effectively** and without constraints or frustration.
- ✦ **Hear, smell, see, self-groom, eliminate and sleep** effectively.
- ✦ **Ability to reproduce** (breeding animals).
- ✦ **Communicate effectively** using species-specific auditory and physical cues (tail, ears, grimace and other facial cues, stance, etc.)

**Do we
Or
Should we
Need legislation?**

How big is the problem?

Can we not resolve extreme conformation voluntarily?

Breed	Life expectancy	< 1.5 years expected life	No. dogs
Jack Russell Terrier	12.7	14-15	1,620
Yorkshire Terrier	12.5	14-15	1,042
Border Collie	12.1	13-14	942
Springer Spaniel	11.9	12-13	790
Crossbred	11.8	14-15	6,511
Labrador Retriever	11.8	12-13	2,500
Staffordshire Bull Terrier	11.3		2,364
Cocker Spaniel	11.3		1,073
Shih-tzu	11.1		638
Cavalier King Charles Spaniel	10.5		867
German Shepherd Dog	10.2		1,110
Boxer			
Beagle	9.9	12-13	172
Husky	9.5	12-13	154
Chihuahua	7.9	15-16	458
American Bulldog	7.8	10-11	129
Pug	7.7	11-12	197
English Bulldog	7.4	9-10	478
French Bulldog	4.5	10-11	232



<https://www.rvc.ac.uk/vetcompass/papers-and-data/original-publications>

scientific reports

OPEN Life tables of annual life expectancy and mortality for companion dogs in the United Kingdom

Kendy Tzu-yun Teng^{1,2,3}, Dave C. Brodbelt¹, Camilla Pegram¹, David B. Church¹ & Dan G. O'Neill¹

A life table is a tabulated expression of life expectancy and mortality-related information at specified ages in a given population. This study utilised VetCompass data to develop life tables for the UK companion dog population and broken down by sex, Kennel Club breed group, and common breeds. Among 30,563 dogs that died between 1st January 2016 and 31st July 2020, life expectancy at age 0 was 11.23 [95% confidence interval (CI): 11.19–11.27] years. Female dogs (11.41 years; 95% CI: 11.35–11.47) had a greater life expectancy than males (11.07 years; 95% CI: 11.01–11.13) at age 0. Life tables varied widely between breeds: Jack Russell Terrier (12.72 years; 95% CI: 12.53–12.90) and French Bulldog (6.33 years; 95% CI: 4.34–8.20) had the longest and shortest life expectancy at age 0, respectively. Life tables generated by the current study allow a deeper understanding of the varied life trajectory across many types of dogs and offer novel insights and applications to improve canine health and welfare. The current study helps promote further understanding of life expectancy, which will benefit pet owners and the veterinary profession, along with many other sectors.

Overall life expectancy of dogs from Year 1: 11.2 years

TENG, K. T.-Y., BRODBELT, D. C., PEGRAM, C., CHURCH, D. B. & O'NEILL, D. G. 2022. Life tables of annual life expectancy and mortality for companion dogs in the United Kingdom. *Scientific Reports*, 12, 6415.



VetCompass Dog Breed	% of 2,283,866 VetCompass dogs in 2023	Number in UK [~12 million]
Crossbreed	24.74	2,969,066
Labrador Retriever	6.25	749,766
Cockapoo	5.45	653,597
English Cocker Spaniel	4.69	562,951
French Bulldog	4.20	503,798
Chihuahua	3.41	409,800
Jack Russell Terrier	3.38	405,307
Staffordshire Bull Terrier	3.07	368,328
Shih-tzu	2.70	324,397
Border Collie	2.51	301,042
Miniature Dachshund	2.13	255,230
German Shepherd Dog	1.90	228,197
English Springer Spaniel	1.86	223,374
Yorkshire Terrier	1.78	213,538
Pug	1.56	186,725
Golden Retriever	1.33	159,051
Cavapoo	1.19	142,658
Labradoodle	1.15	137,803
English Bulldog	1.10	132,024
Cavalier King Charles Spaniel	1.09	130,815
West Highland White Terrier	0.91	109,688
American Bulldog	0.91	108,763
Bichon Frise	0.85	101,822
Border Terrier	0.85	101,486
Dachshund	0.84	100,424
Miniature Schnauzer	0.83	99,810
Lhasa Apso	0.82	97,981

UK: Licensing of Activities Involving Animals (England) Regulations 2018

Pursuant to s. 13 of the AWA, the LAIA Regulations were introduced to regulate a number of activities involving animals, including that of commercial dog breeding.

Sch 6, 6(5) directly addresses the issue of breeding dogs to an extreme conformation:

‘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 welfare of its offspring.’



Legal Advisory Group on Extreme Conformation in Dogs

Working towards a legal framework for responsible dog breeding. Our vision is a world where every domestic dog is born free from extremes of conformation that harm their health and welfare.

Overview

The Legal Advisory Group on Extreme Conformation in Dogs (LAGECDogs) are a multi-disciplinary sub-group situated within the UK Centre for Animal Law (A-LAW). We apply our legal, scientific and welfare expertise to the creation of a more effective legal and policy regime in the UK to protect domesticated dogs from conformation-related suffering. Our LAGECDogs research and analysis address the capacity of current and future legal frameworks to protect dogs from the harms resulting from selective breeding for conformational extremes, with much of our early work focused on the legal and welfare issues around brachycephaly (short muzzle).

In our view, the current law and policy in the UK must do more to reverse the normalisation, and indeed, celebration of extreme conformation in dogs across UK society. Improvements in coverage, clarity and enforcement of the law would promote a greater understanding among purchasers, owners, breeders and the wider public of the basic key physical traits and biological functions needed by all dogs to protect their health and welfare. These traits include fundamental natural abilities of dogs to breathe, blink, sleep, exercise, mate and give birth naturally, as well as to exhibit evolutionary normal canine behaviours such as interacting with conspecifics, playing and maintaining their own hygiene.

Purpose



INFLUENCING CHANGE THROUGH POLITICS

To use the influence of experts and politicians to raise the welfare of animals nationally and internationally.

APGAW DOG BREEDING PROJECT

APGAW believes that every animal should have a life worth living and management of welfare should not be limited to mitigating negative consequences, but also promoting positive experiences and enhancing welfare. APGAW's view is that there are a significant number of animals bred that can never experience a life worth living because they have been born with physical problems and pain from the very start.

This project is led by:

APGAW director Marisa Heath who was the author of the Parliamentary report A Healthier Future for Pedigree Dogs, worked on the DEFRA Expert Panel for the Licensing of Activities Involving Animals Regulations 2018 and runs the Canine & Feline Sector Group advising Government on all issues relating to dog and cat health and welfare.

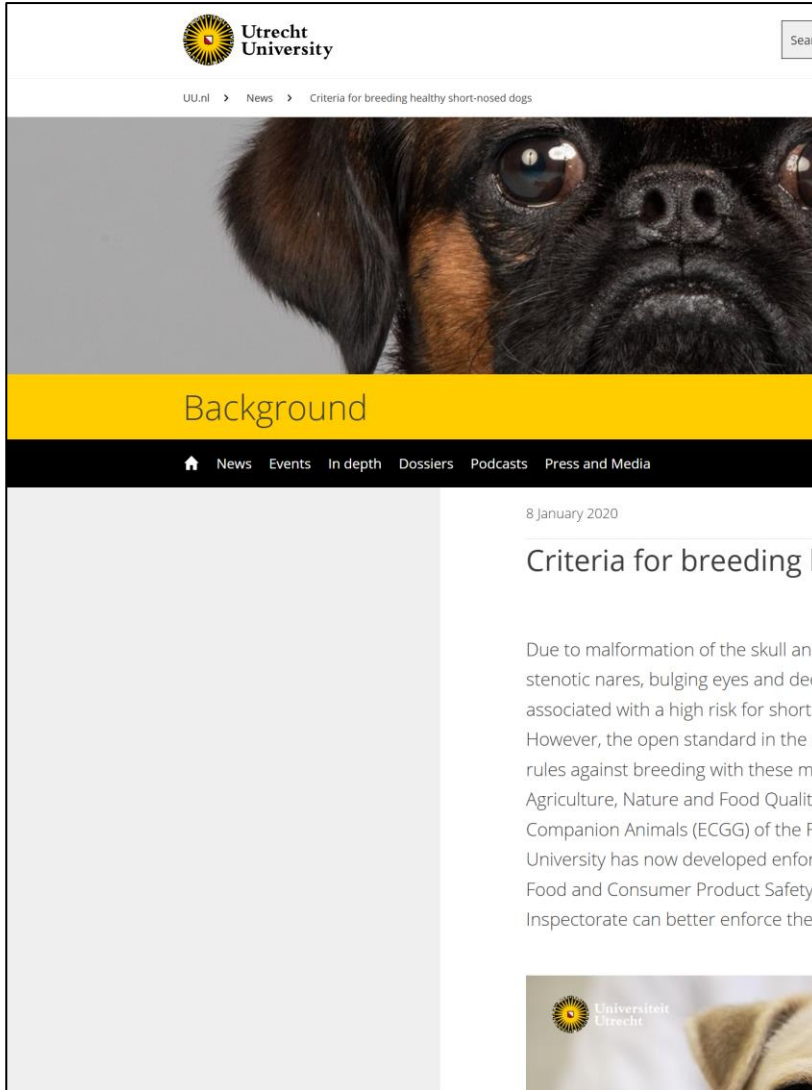
Dr Dan O'Neill who is an expert veterinary surgeon who has been at the forefront of the Vet Compass project as well as chairing the UK Brachycephalic Working Group (BWG) since 2016 and being a founding member of the International Collaborative on Extreme Conformations in Dogs (ICECDogs).

Vanessa Barnes who is a legal expert and has been at the forefront of the work on dog breeding. She is a member of the Legal Advisory Group on Extreme Conformation in Dogs (LAGECDogs) formed of a number of legal and academic experts and part of the UK Centre for Animal Welfare (A-LAW).

WORKSTREAM 1: The Innate Health Assessment

“Stop and think before acquiring a dog with extreme conformation”

The Netherlands



Utrecht University

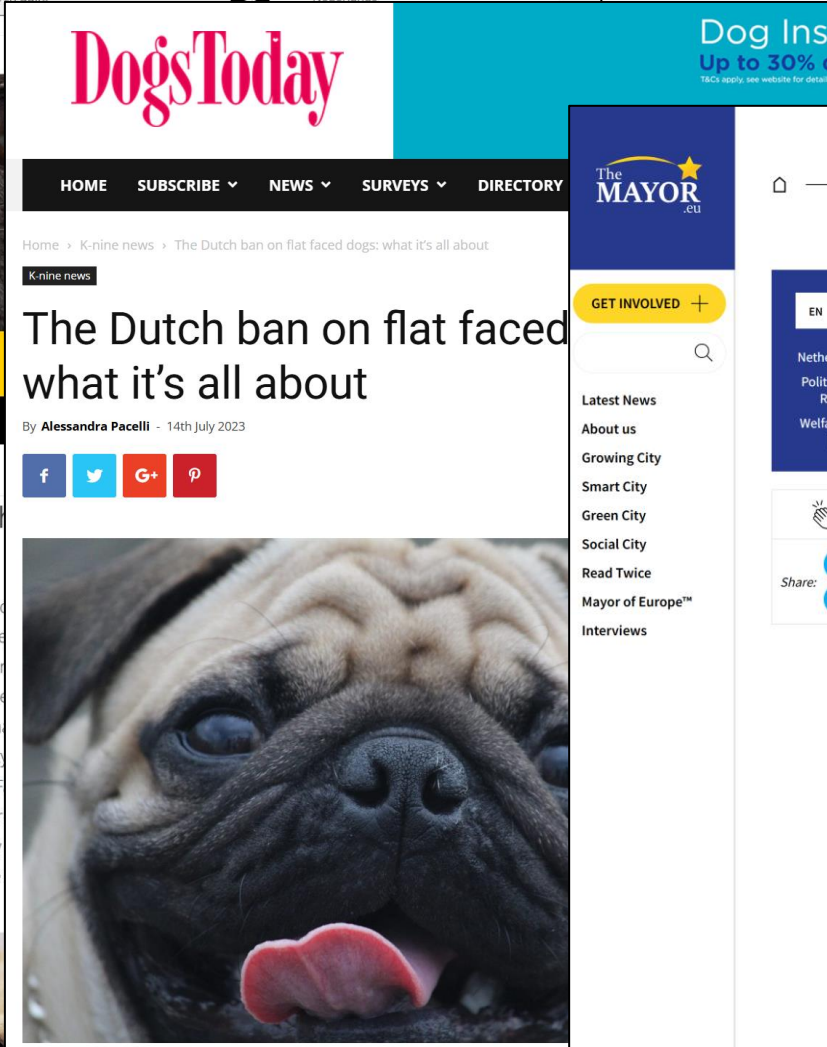
UU.nl > News > Criteria for breeding healthy short-nosed dogs

Background

8 January 2020

Criteria for breeding

Due to malformation of the skull and stenotic nares, bulging eyes and deep associated with a high risk for short However, the open standard in the rules against breeding with these m Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality Companion Animals (ECGG) of the F University has now developed enfor Food and Consumer Product Safety Inspectorate can better enforce the




Dogs Today

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Home > K-nine news > The Dutch ban on flat faced dogs: what it's all about

The Dutch ban on flat faced dogs: what it's all about

By **Alessandra Pacelli** - 14th July 2023



In our August 2019 issue, we reported on the Dutch government's decision to ban the breeding of 'flat faced' dogs. Now, they're looking to go one step further – banning their ownership altogether. What is it all about?



The Mayor

EN

- Netherlands
- Politics and Reforms
- Welfare and Health

Dutch government to ban ownership of flat-faced dogs



Looks like there will be no more pugs in the Netherlands soon, Source: Depositphotos

2 MIN READ | 2023-01-27 15:35:48 (LAST EDIT 2023-01-27 17:24:05) | TZVETQZAR VINCENT IOLOV

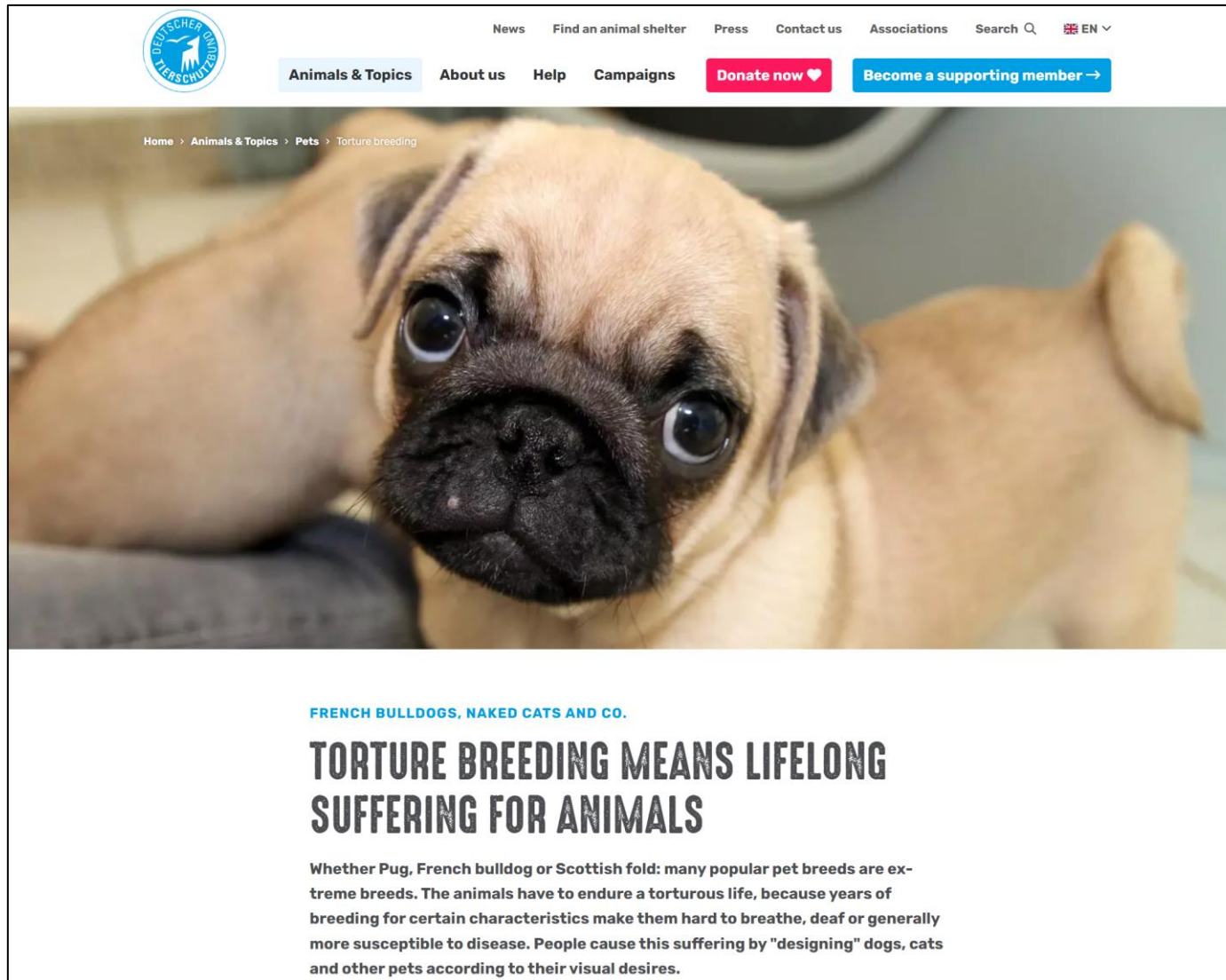
Dutch government to ban ownership of flat-faced dogs

Citing concerns about humaneness, the legislation aims to discourage the proliferation of the so-called designer pet breeds

The Dutch authorities are looking to expand the scope of legislation concerning the ownership of designer pet breeds with the goal of prohibiting the ownership of such animals. The cited concern is that such pets

“Stop and think before acquiring a dog with extreme conformation”

Germany - Qualzucht



The screenshot shows a website header for 'DEUTSCHER TIERSCHUTZ' with navigation links: News, Find an animal shelter, Press, Contact us, Associations, Search Q, and EN. Below the header are buttons for 'Animals & Topics', 'About us', 'Help', 'Campaigns', 'Donate now', and 'Become a supporting member'. The main content area features a large image of a pug puppy and a breadcrumb trail: Home > Animals & Topics > Pets > Torture breeding. The article title is 'TORTURE BREEDING MEANS LIFELONG SUFFERING FOR ANIMALS' with a sub-headline 'FRENCH BULLDOGS, NAKED CATS AND CO.'. The text discusses the health issues of extreme breeds like pugs, French bulldogs, and Scottish folds.

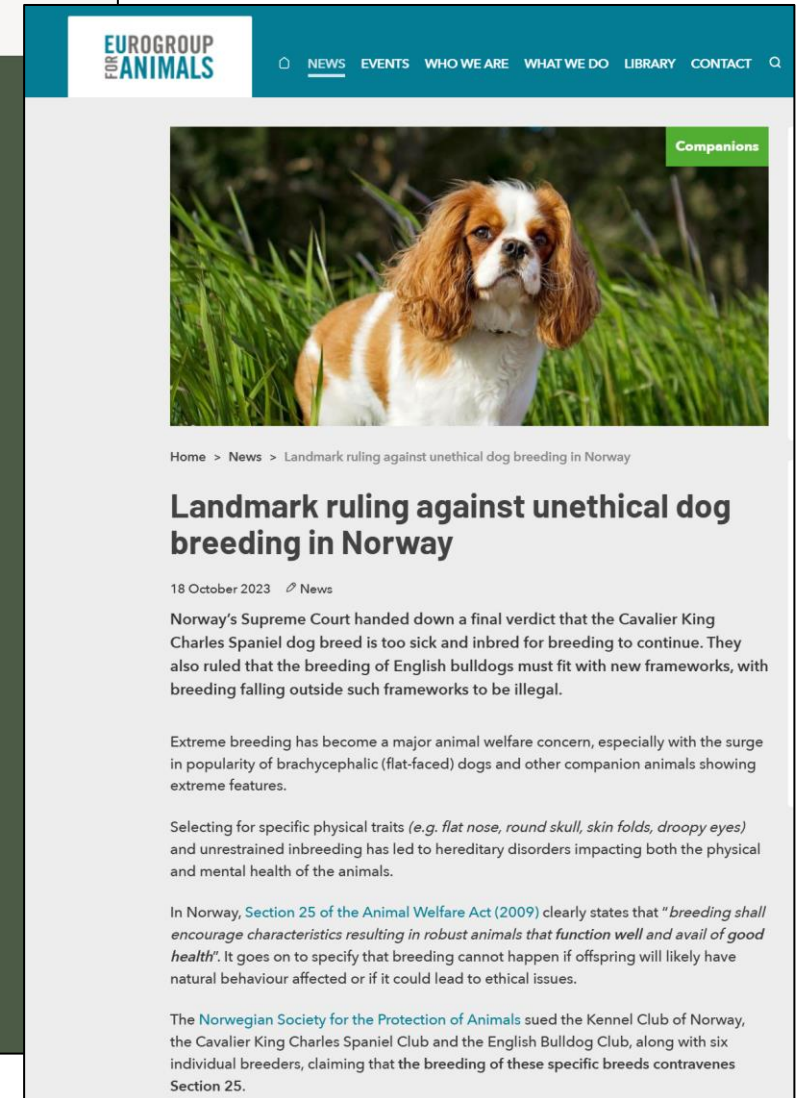
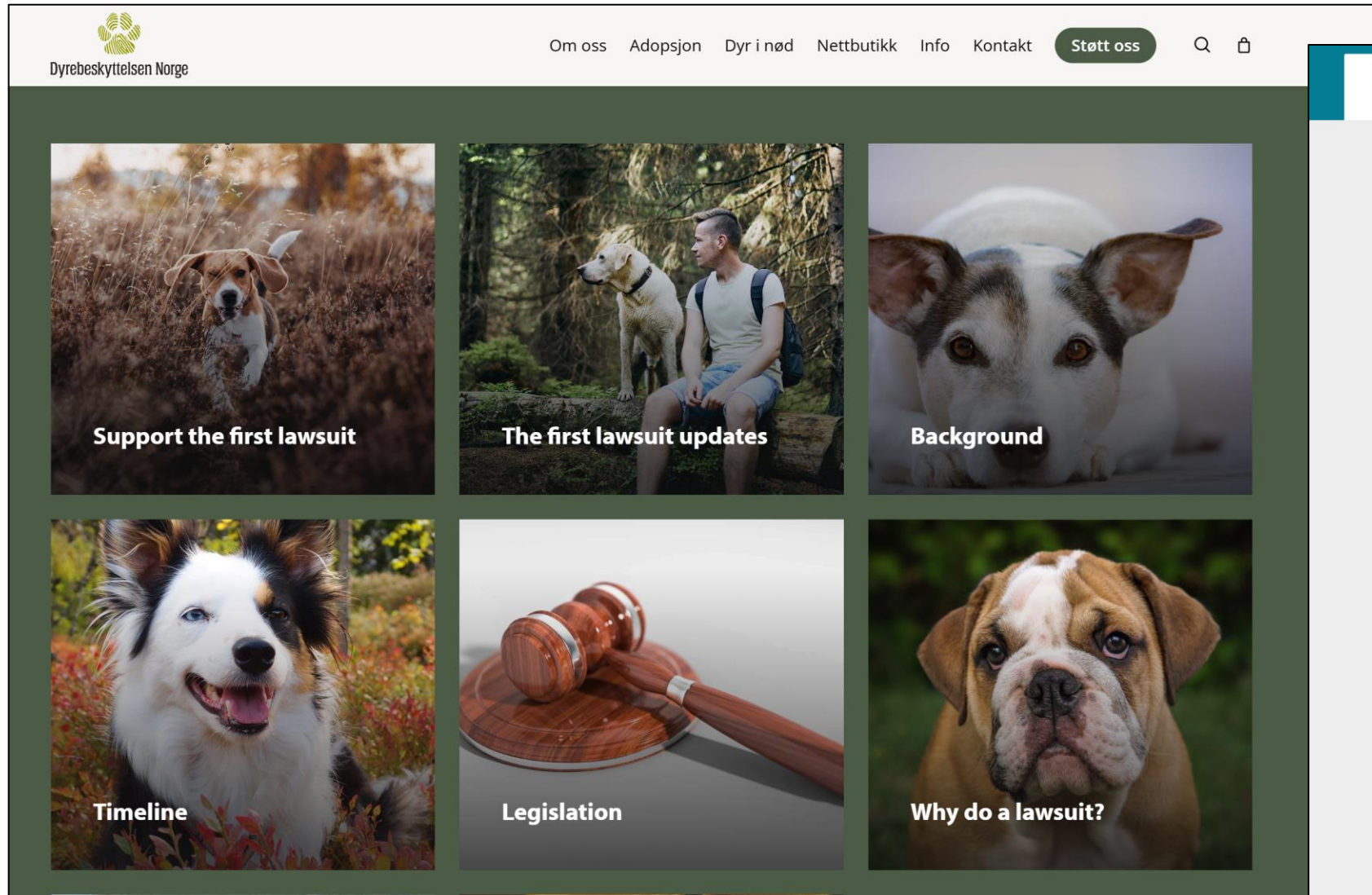
Home > Animals & Topics > Pets > Torture breeding

FRENCH BULLDOGS, NAKED CATS AND CO.

TORTURE BREEDING MEANS LIFELONG SUFFERING FOR ANIMALS

Whether Pug, French bulldog or Scottish fold: many popular pet breeds are extreme breeds. The animals have to endure a torturous life, because years of breeding for certain characteristics make them hard to breathe, deaf or generally more susceptible to disease. People cause this suffering by "designing" dogs, cats and other pets according to their visual desires.

Norway - The Norwegian Society for Protection of Animals



How does biomedical health differ between purebred Pugs and 'designer' Pug outcrosses (Puggle and Jug)

Paper in preparation: Scientific Reports

A solution right under our nose? Comparing Pugs versus Pug- crosses for health, behaviour and owner attachment



Dr Rowena Packer



Dr Dan O'Neill



Dr Lizzie Youens

Dr Zoe Belshaw, Sayaka Mochizuki, Johanna Neufuss, Dr Mickey Tivers



RSPCA.



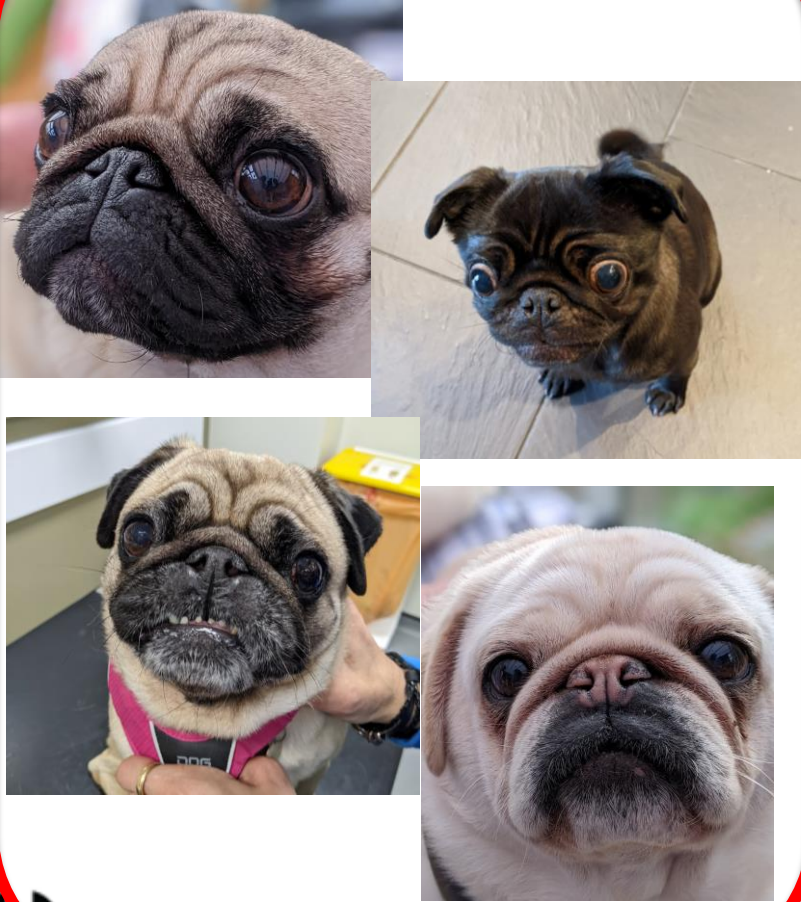
"Stop and think before acquiring a dog with extreme conformation"

Virtual Dog Health Forum – 'Bridging the Gap' – 3rd & 4th June 2025



- **Sample:** 51 purebred Pugs, 51 Jugs (Jack Russell x Pug), 48 Puggles (Beagle x Pug)
- **Recruitment:** Social media, vet practices, veterinary/animal welfare organisations

Pugs



Jugs



Puggles



"Stop and think before acquiring a dog with extreme conformation"

Key Results

Median veterinary costs per month:

Pug (£41.67) significantly higher than Jug (£9.65) or Puggle (£10.17)

Heat, eating, sleep & breathing dysfunction:

Pug significantly higher dysfunction vs Jug or Puggle

Canine Brief Pain Inventory:

Pug significantly higher pain than Jug or Puggle

CBARQ:

Few differences, Pug less trainable than Jug or Puggle

MDORS:

No differences in emotional closeness or perceived costs

Respiratory Function Grading:

Pug: Zero scored Grade 0 & 47.1% Grade 2-3

Jug: 100% scored Grade 0

Puggle: 97.9% scored Grade 0

Nostril stenosis:

Severe nostril stenosis only in Pug (grades 3-5/5)

Orthopaedic exam:

Pug significantly more likely to show abnormalities in 7/11 domains assessed

Problem-solving task:

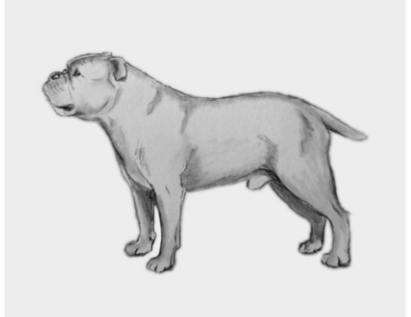
No differences

Body condition:

Overweight: Pug (24%) vs Puggle (38%) & Jug (2%)

Sweden - The Swedish Kennel Club

English Bulldogg



Moderately large eyes, neither deep set nor protruding with normally fitting eyelids
Eyelids that are not normally fitting increase the risk of eye problems

Longer and slightly less broad skull
A short and broad skull is a risk factor for, for instance, BOAS in English bulldogs.

Ribs easily palpable
Obesity is a risk factor, for instance for BOAS.

Slightly longer back with a normally shaped spine
A short back and roach back are risk factors for spinal problems and make natural behaviours more difficult

Craniofacial ratio close to 0,4. Absolute minimum 0,3.
Less relative muzzle length is a risk factor, for instans for BOAS.

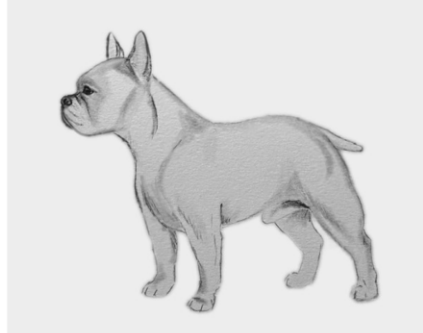
Fully open nostrils
Stenotic nostrils are a risk factor for BOAS in English Bulldoggs.

Slightly slimmer neck that must never be perceived as short
A broader and shorter neck is a risk factor for BOAS in English Bulldoggs.

Normally shaped tail
Short tail and screw tail is a risk factor (DVL2)

Healthy skin, a small amount of fine wrinkles can be present
Skinfolds can cause irritation and inflammation. A nose wrinkle can also disturb the eyes and breathing.

French Bulldogg



Non protruding and not completely round eyes
Protruding eyes (shallow eye sockets) increase the risk of eye injuries.

Slightly longer and less broad skull
Short and broad skull is a risk factor for, for instance, BOAS

Slightly longer and slimmer neck
Broader and shorter neck is a risk factor for BOAS for French Bulldoggs.

Craniofacial ratio higher than 0,3
Less relative muzzle length is a risk factor for BOAS for French Bulloggs. CFR 0,3 is a minimum not an ideal.

Completely open nostrils
Stenotic nostrils are a risk factor for BOAS for French Bulldoggs.


Slightly longer back (normal development of spine)
Short back and roach is a risk factor for back pain and inability to perform natural behaviours.

Skin without skinfolds, a small amount of wrinkles can be present
Skinfolds can cause irritation and inflammation. A nose wrinkle can also disturb eyes and breathing.

Normally shaped tail
Short tail and screw tail is a risk factor (DVL2)

Visible waist
Overweight is a risk factor

Boston Terrier



Non protruding and not completely round eyes without visible sclera (white of the eye)
Protruding eyes (shallow eye sockets) increase the risk of eye injuries. Visible sclera is linked to an increased risk of BOAS in Boston Terriers.

Slightly longer and less broad skull
Short and broad skull is a risk factor for, for instance, BOAS in Boston Terriers.

Slightly longer and slimmer neck
Broader and shorter neck is a risk factor for BOAS in Boston Terriers.

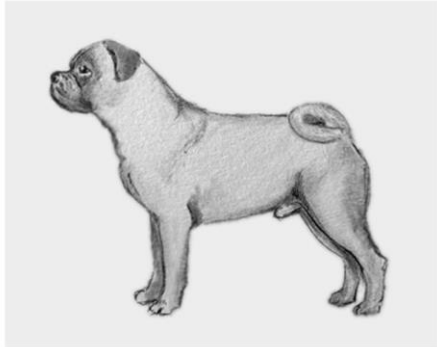
Craniofacial ratio close to 0,4 with 0,3 as a minimum. Muzzle without no nasal folds
Less relative muzzle length is a risk factor for BOAS in Boston Terriers.

Slightly longer back (normally shaped spine)
Short back and roach are risk factors for spinal problems.

Completely open nostrils
Stenotic nostrils are a risk factor for BOAS in Boston Terriers.

Normally shaped tail
Screw tail is a risk factor (DVL2) and short tail may be linked to BOAS in Boston Terriers.

Pug



Craniofacial ratio greater than 0.3
Less relative nose length is a risk factor for BOAS. 0.3 is a minimum, not an ideal.

Slightly longer and less broad skull
A short and broad skull is a risk factor for instance for BOAS in pugs.

Visible waist and easily palpable ribs
Obesity is a risk factor for BOAS in pugs.

Less width between the eyes
A wide distance between the eyes is a clear risk factor for BOAS in pugs.

Slightly longer back, less compact body
A short back is a risk factor for spinal problems and can make natural functions more difficult.

Non-protruding and not completely round eyes
Protruding eyes increase the risk of eye injuries.

Skin without wrinkles, a small amount of fine wrinkles may be present on the head
Wrinkled and excessive skin. Wrinkles can cause irritation and inflammation. Nose wrinkle can also interfere with eyes and breathing.

Completely open nostrils
Pinched/stenotic nostrils are risk factors for BOAS in pugs.

Slightly longer and narrower neck
A broader and shorter neck is a risk factor for BOAS.

Stop and think before acquiring a dog with extreme conformation"

Over to you all now to be part of this journey to better health and well-being for dogs:

- ✘ Discuss which current actions (from IDHW) should be kept, changed or discarded.
- ✘ Discuss the reasons for slow progress over past decades
- ✘ Identify key barriers to progress
- ✘ Identify new actions/projects (SMART, not wooly!!)
- ✘ Participants publicly make resolutions on how they can contribute to positive welfare change for dogs

Thank you for caring about dogs

Acknowledgements

VetCompass™ Vet practices



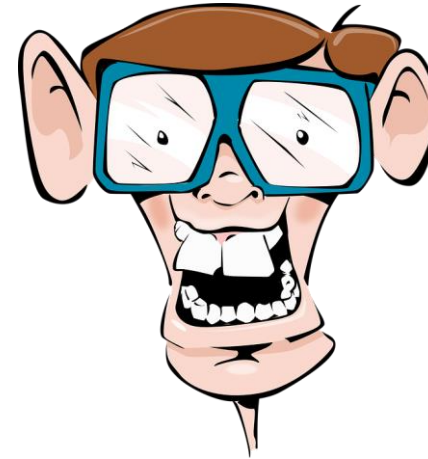
Dr Dan O'Neill



Prof Dave Brodbelt



Prof David Church



Noel Kennedy



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International Collaborative on Extreme Conformations in Dogs

“Stop and think before acquiring a dog with extreme conformation”

Virtual Dog Health Forum – ‘Bridging the Gap’ – 3rd & 4th June 2025

