Royal Kennel Club

NEWS RELEASE

ROYAL KENNEL CLUB ANNOUNCES IMPROVEMENTS TO THE JUDGES EDUCATION PROGRAMME

LONDON, 16 NOVEMBER: The Royal Kennel Club (RKC) has announced continuing improvements to its Judges Education Programme (JEP) for dog shows, following recommendations from the JEP Review report and valuable ongoing feedback from stakeholders.

Since the RKC received the report in May 2026, the team has developed changes intended to strengthen the programme while making it simpler, clearer and more flexible for everyone involved.

The RKC would like to thank judges, Breed Education Coordinators (BECs), breed clubs and councils, show organisers and exhibitors for their patience, support and valuable input as work continues to enhance the JEP.

The further improvements being developed for the JEP include:

All judges

- **Critiques Website** improvements planned for 2027 are being brought forward providing for a better experience for judges and exhibitors.
- **Find A Judge** will be improved, making it easier for judges to showcase their experience and for show organisers to search for and identify suitable judges.
- **Judge Licensing** will be introduced during 2027 at no initial cost to judges. This will provide a clearer framework for maintaining standards, supporting continued development; and help to ensure judges' details remain accurate and up to date.
- **Hands-on Experience and Judging Appointment Requirements** will be revised to ensure they remain relevant and meaningful.
- **Breed Specific Assessments (BSAs)** are being reformatted to provide a clearer and simpler way for judges to demonstrate their breed knowledge and understanding.
- **Eye For A Dog Assessment (EFAD)** will remain a requirement for approvals for new Level 5 Group and Level 6 Best in Show judges. Flexibility will be introduced for judges wishing to expand their Level 4 breed judging with or without an Eye For A Dog Assessment pass.

Points of clarification

- **Group and Best in Show judging at Open Shows** there will be no immediate changes to the eligibility of judges to judge such appointments. The JEP Review recommended a change for general and group open shows to require judges to have passed the Eye For A Dog Assessment to judge Best in Show and Groups for which they are not breed qualified at Level 4 (CC) status. In time, the RKC intends to move forward with introducing the change.

To allow judges and show organisers sufficient opportunity to plan and adjust, there is no intention to introduce these changes before 1 January 2030.

- **Any Variety (AV) Classes, Stakes and Groups at General and Group Championship shows.** Judges appointed to judge AV classes, stakes classes, puppy group, junior group, veteran group, or special beginners group must be eligible and listed at Judges Education Programme Level 5 or above; or eligible and listed at Level 4 for at least one breed and have passed the Eye For A Dog assessment. Or, in accordance with current practice, eligible and listed at JEP Level 4 for at least three unconnected (i.e. non-variety) breeds.

  This change is effective from 1 January 2027; and judges and show organisers should plan accordingly.

  For judging appointments taking place on or after 1 January 2030, judges appointed to judge AV classes, stakes classes, puppy group, junior group, veteran group, or special beginners group must be eligible and listed at Judges Education Programme Level 4 or above and have passed the Eye For A Dog assessment.

- **Judging Intervals** the RKC is implementing the recommendation to adjust championship show level judging intervals. This has been much called for from our exhibitor community.

  From 1 January 2029, the judging interval for Group and Best in Show appointments will expand from 9 months to 12 months.

  From 1 January 2030, the judging interval for breed Level 4 (CC) appointments will expand from 18 months to 24 months.

  Judges and show organisers should start to plan accordingly.

- **Supported Entry Open Shows** as part of the commitment to look for ways to simplify the JEP, this regulatory requirement is being removed from 1 January 2027.

  The RKC encourages and recommends breed clubs to proactively and creatively engage with and support our general and group open dog show scene. It remains a vital means for breed judges to develop their judging experience and knowledge. This is best achieved in a flexible and pragmatic way without the need for prescriptive mandatory regulation. The RKC will keep this area under review.

Level 5 and Level 6 judges

- **Revised Requirements.** The RKC continues to listen and the minimum criteria for consideration for approval for new Level 5 Group and Level 6 Best in Show judges are being replaced with more clearly defined thresholds as recommended in the JEP Review report. This will provide for more simplicity and transparency.

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Level 2 and Level 3 judges

- **Mentoring and Observation** will be simplified to provide greater clarity, flexibility and opportunities for judges to progress when they are ready. Level 3 observation will cease as a separate activity and requirement, replaced by an additional Level 3 mentoring session. This will allow observer and mentor lists to be combined, creating a simpler and more streamlined approach. The criteria for maintaining and expanding mentor lists will also be reviewed to increase the availability of mentors and better support judges in training.

  Many judges in training start their mentoring journey with Group mentoring often alongside attendance at a Breed Appreciation Day (BAD). Group mentoring will be repositioned from a Level 3 to Level 2 activity and requirement.

New judges beginning their judging journey

- **Level 1 Training Courses and Assessments** will be redesigned, strengthening the foundations and support available to those beginning their dog show judging.

What does this mean for judges?

The aim is to make the JEP easier to understand and navigate, with clearer expectations at each stage of a judge's development.

These changes will be introduced progressively during the rest of 2026 and into 2027 and beyond. Information and guidance will be provided throughout the change process.

Improvements that have a significant impact on those involved with the JEP will be communicated well in advance. They will be introduced in a reasonable, measured and managed way, with engagement, communication and cooperation at the heart of the implementation process.

More limited operational improvements will be communicated directly to BECs and those judges affected.

The guiding principle throughout remains business as usual until changes are announced and introduced.

All JEP-related materials, including website content and Codes of Best Practice are being reviewed and updated. The RKC would like to thank all stakeholders for their patience while this major task is completed.

Where is more detailed information available?

For the latest information, including updates as they are announced, please refer to the JEP section of the Judging Dog Shows page of the RKC website.

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What improvements have been made so far?

- **July 2026:**
  - Introduction of the Level 4 Breed Specific Assessment (BSA) relaxation.
  - Introduction of a new rolling application procedure for Level 4 breed status for Level 5 Group Policy Judges.
- **August 2026:**
  - Greater flexibility within JEP levels and between Levels 1 and 2. Requirements no longer need to be completed in a prescribed order within a JEP level; and Level 2 Breed Appreciation Days (BADs) and Multiple-choice Examinations (MCEs) may be undertaken before completing Level 1.
  - Simplification of Level 3 requirements. Attendance at a field trial/gundog test and the German Shepherd Dog seminar and examination are no longer mandatory.
  - Mentoring restricted to focus on up to two mentoring sessions per day for two different breeds.
- **September 2026:**
  - Judges who have not yet achieved Level 4 status in any breed are limited to registering a maximum of 10 breeds at Level 2 or Level 3 to better focus their early-stage judge training and experience.
  - New Level 5 Group judges are required to have attended a BAD and passed a MCE for remaining breeds within their Group before achieving Level 2 status for those breeds.

More information is available in the JEP section of the Judging Dog Shows page of the RKC website.

ENDS

The Royal Kennel Club

The Royal Kennel Club (RKC) is the UK's leading organisation dedicated to the health, wellbeing, and happiness of all dogs. Granted the royal prefix by His Majesty King Charles III in 2025, the RKC builds on over 150 years of heritage to champion responsible ownership and ensure every dog leads a healthy, fulfilling life.

As a profit-for-purpose organisation, the Royal Kennel Club reinvests in dog health, research, and education, extending its expertise beyond pedigree breeds to benefit every dog in the UK. It maintains the country's largest registration database for both pedigree and crossbreed dogs, alongside Petlog, one of the UK's biggest microchip reunification services, and runs the Royal Kennel Club Good Citizen Dog Training scheme, the nation's most extensive dog training programme.

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The RKC licenses and supports a wide range of dog activities and shows, including the world-famous Crufts, now evolving into a year-round community celebrating dogs and their owners. Through the Kennel Club Charitable Trust, the organisation funds vital research into canine health and wellbeing, supports breed rescue organisations across the UK, and works with partners such as the British Veterinary Association to run national health screening schemes.