



Royal Kennel Club

Summary of the RKC's developing Nose-to-Tail Veterinary Visual Assessment July 2026

Please note: This document has been produced as part of the ongoing development of the RKC's Nose-to-Tail Veterinary Visual Assessment. The assessment is still being refined, and further revisions may be made before its official launch. The information presented in this document reflects the current stage of development and is intended to provide an overview of the assessment as it stands at this time.

Extreme conformation in dogs describes a physical appearance that is so exaggerated that affected dogs commonly suffer from poor health and welfare, with negative impacts on their quality and/or quantity of life.

The Royal Kennel Club's new Nose-to-Tail Veterinary Visual Assessment is being developed as an evidence-based, veterinary-led tool to assess visible conformation that may be associated with health and/or welfare concerns. The aim is to create a standard assessment (applicable to any breed) to support breeders in making informed and responsible breeding decisions.

The assessment is intended to be a one-time check carried out before breeding in adult dogs. There may be different minimum ages for fast and slow maturing breeds, and some slow-maturing breeds may have provisional and final minimum ages for provisional and final assessment, to allow breeding before full physical maturity. The assessment will include a set number of graded criteria. Where possible, each criterion will be graded on a scale 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 14 criteria and they were all graded 0-3, the minimum score that a dog could achieve would be 0 and the maximum would be 42. This could allow comparison between dogs, monitoring of breed averages over time, and can support future efforts to reduce extreme conformation associated with health and/or welfare concerns.

Whilst subject to change, the current criteria are as follows:

Visually assessed and graded criteria:

(These criteria are assessed by the vet without the use of tools. Examination involves touching and moving the dog, but no instruments are required. Each criterion is graded according to predefined categories on a scale from 0-3)

- Nostrils
- Dentition
- Facial skin
- Eyelids
- Eye socket and globe size
- Wrinkles on body and legs
- Outward or inward turning of the front feet
- Outward or inward turning of the hind feet and hocks
- Patella scoring
- Tail length and mobility

Measured and graded criteria:

(This criterion is measured by the vet using a measuring device, typically a soft tape measure or string. The criterion is graded according to predefined categories on a scale from 0-3)

- Craniofacial ratio

Measured criteria:

(These criteria are measured by the vet using a measuring device, typically a soft tape measure or string. The measurements are recorded as part of the assessment but not graded and do not currently contribute towards the overall score)

- Neck girth to chest girth ratio
- Ground clearance ratio
- Back length ratio

Also noted during the assessment:

- Movement (recorded as “acceptable” or “unsatisfactory”, not graded)
- Body condition score
- Presence of testicles in scrotum
- General and advisory comments (general comments are positive or temporary findings, advisory comments are possible breeding concerns)

The Nose-to-Tail Veterinary Visual Assessment builds on many years of work and the framework introduced at launch is the current format. It will continue to evolve over time and be refined through extensive consultation with both veterinary and breeder stakeholder groups. Some criteria will be measured but not graded initially and will only contribute to grading once sufficient data is available to establish robust and evidence-based grade boundaries. As the assessment develops, any measurements that do not ultimately contribute to grading or provide meaningful value will be reviewed and removed. Similarly, criteria could also be introduced in the future if supported by sufficient evidence.