

The Bearded Collie Breed Liaison Committee



Report on the Breeders Regional Workshops

A THE WORKSHOPS

1. Background

In May 2016 the JBLC announced plans for a series of workshops to enable Bearded Collie breeders, stud dog owners and other Bearded Collie enthusiasts to meet and discuss the challenges facing the breed. The workshops were organised regionally to encourage as many people as possible to take part, and were structured to give focus to the discussion and support a collaborative approach. The specific aim of the workshops was:

‘to provide a forum for attendees to meet, share issues and concerns, and identify effective ways of balancing breeders’ interests and motivation and the action needed to secure long term sustainable breeding. All thoughts, ideas and information from these workshops will be taken forward to develop a strategy for the breed, in conjunction with best available external advice as appropriate.’

2. The Workshops

Five Breeders Workshops were held between 27 August 2016 and 11 February 2017, each held in a different part of the country and jointly organised by JBLC representatives and the relevant Breed Club Committee:

Date	Area	Organising Club
27 August	Midlands	BCC
25 September	East	EBCA
13 November	Scotland	BCCS
20 November	South of England	SCBCC
11 February	North of England	NBCC

2.1 Who took part?

A total of 104 people took part in the workshops, five of whom attended two separate events. Although called ‘Breeders Workshops’, the workshops were publicised as being open to all breed enthusiasts, and the participants covered a range of interests including current and former breeders, stud dog owners, judges, obedience/working tests, behavioural experts, aspiring breeders, and owners committed to the best interests of the breed.

2.2 How did participants rate the workshops?

Feedback questionnaires were completed by over 80% of the participants and the majority of responses were positive.

- 96% rated the workshop overall as either Good (56%) or Excellent (40%)
- 69% thought the aims of the workshop were achieved either to a considerable degree (60%) or fully (9%)
- 100% indicated they would either probably (27%) or definitely (73%) recommend the workshop to other people.
- 54% said they felt moderately more positive (46%), or much more positive (8%) about the future of the breed as a result of workshop. Only 2% felt less positive. The remaining participants felt the same or slightly more positive.

2.3 How well did the process work?

In the first part of the workshop people shared their concerns by writing them on post-its, grouping them in topics, and then discussing them. The feedback forms indicate that people appreciated the opportunity for open discussion of concerns and the way the workshop enabled a wide variety of opinions to be aired.

Because of time constraints, people were only able to discuss the causes (and possible solutions) for some of the areas of concern.

The workshops had mixed success in 'getting to the bottom' of some of the areas of concern they discussed. As this was an unfamiliar activity for most people this is to be expected.

Most groups were more confident about discussing what to do and had several action ideas, but did not always reach a consensus in the time available. Again, this is to be expected when the roots of the problem are not clear, or when further information or investigation needs to be done first. Deciding between different possible actions is also easier if there is general agreement about an overall goal - the future direction of the breed is an important consideration, but it has not yet been discussed.

Where groups did not 'get to the bottom' of the concern, the suggest actions tend to deal with the concern (the 'symptoms') rather than its root cause (the underlying 'illness'). The JBLC will take this into account when deciding what actions to take.

As this was the first time an organised attempt has been made to discuss issues facing the breed, the overall progress made was very encouraging. All the workshops produced useful insights to feed into the long-term plan, demonstrating what can be achieved when everyone works together.

B WHAT CONCERNS/ISSUES DID PEOPLE IDENTIFY?

The first part of the workshop encouraged people to share their views on the issues and concerns facing the breed.

Although the concerns identified in each workshop varied, there was considerable commonality between them. The 'top five' concerns (broadly based on number of times they were identified) were:

Loss of **genetic diversity/popular sires**/concern about **inbreeding**

Lack of honesty and openness about health issues; existence of a **blame culture**

The **adverse impact of the show ring**

The **shortfall in newcomers to the breed** who will form the next generation of owners, breeders and judges

Auto-immune disease.

Other frequently-raised concerns were:

Changes in **breed type**

Changes in **temperament** (including behaviour issues)

Concerns about **health information, records and testing**, including concerns about availability and cost, understanding etc; also health surveillance

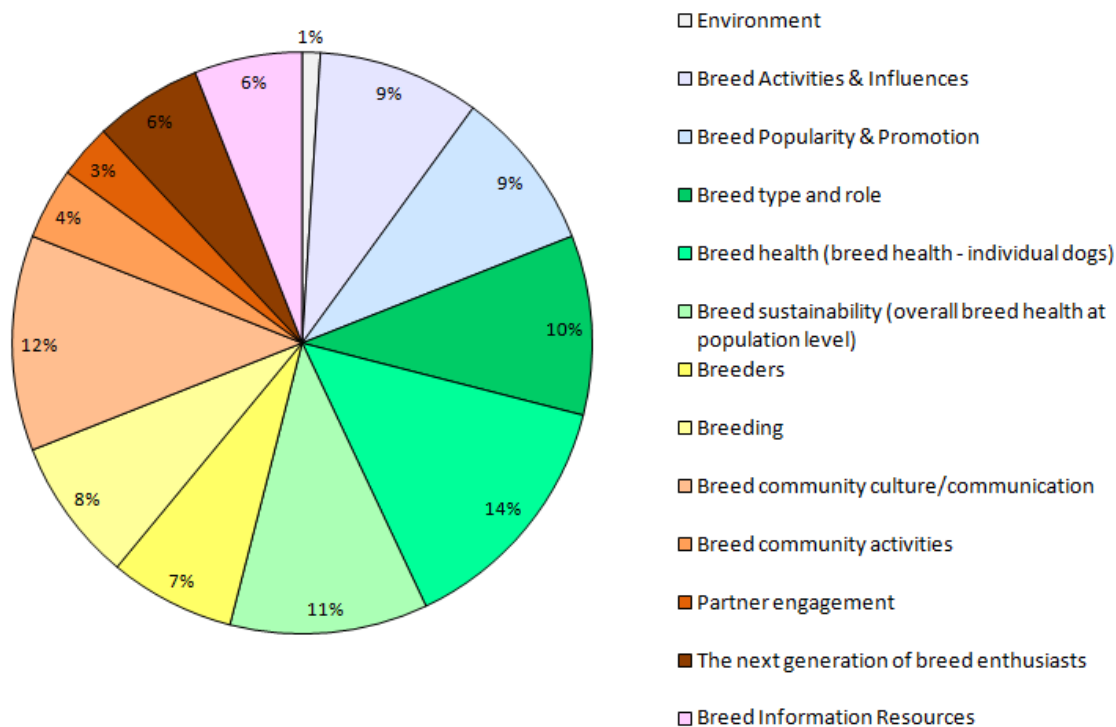
Breeders' **motivation, attitudes and impact**

Knowledge/education of owners, breeders/stud dog owners, and judges

Decline in **breed popularity and population size**, including concern about (i) general market trends/environment (ii) what buyers want, (iii) how to promote the breed and avoid/address negative perceptions.

Chart 1 shows the issues/concerns recorded on post-its, summarised under broad headings. A more detailed breakdown is given in the Appendix.

Chart 1: Concerns/Issues raised (% in each Topic Area)



C THE MAIN CONCERNS/ISSUES : What causes were identified and what actions were suggested?

This section looks at the concerns chosen for further consideration during the workshops, the underlying causes identified and the actions which were suggested.

1. Loss of genetic diversity, over-use of popular sires and the impact of the show ring

These concerns are taken together because there was a considerable overlap in the causes identified and actions suggested.

The main cause of loss of genetic diversity in Beardies is the result of **too little of the genetic variation present in one generation being passed on** to subsequent generations.

The **underlying reasons** for loss of genetic diversity identified were:

- **over-use of popular sires** (see 1.1 below)
- **repeat matings** - these were noted as a cause but not discussed in detail in the workshops.

Loss of genetic variation also occurs as a result of **inbreeding** (because inbred individuals are more likely to have two identical copies of each gene rather than two different ones, which is a form of loss of genetic variation.)

Concerns about reductions in libido, fertility and litter size were raised at all of the workshops, with some post-its making the connection with **inbreeding**, and the occasional reference to inbreeding and reduced lifespan. None of the workshops discussed inbreeding in connection with reduced fitness for breeding.

Other factors hindering action:

- **lack of understanding of COIs and inbreeding** (see 1.2 below)

1.1 Over-use of Popular Sires

The underlying reasons for over-use of popular sires were:

- the **impact of the show ring** (people want to win, so use a champion sire or dog that produces regular winners; puppies with champions in their pedigree are easier to sell)
Note: The impact of the show ring was a significant concern in its own right because of the range of effects it was felt to have on the breed.
- **practical reasons** (greater likelihood of an easy mating - effective stud dog, experienced handler)
- **lack of knowledge** (occasional breeders may not know how to choose a suitable sire and so go to the nearest popular sire).

Suggested actions on the over-use of popular sires

i. Limit the permitted number of matings for stud dogs

Three workshops (BCC, EBCA and SCBCC) proposed limiting the number of matings as a solution to the over-use of popular sires.

- *The EBCA workshop came close to a consensus about restricting stud dogs to 2 matings per year but failed to reach it when people realised the limit would apply to their dogs and not just popular sires.*
- *The SCBCC considered whether clubs could jointly agree to refuse non-compliant owners entry to their events, but since clubs' codes of ethics are more stringent than the Kennel Club's it seemed unlikely that clubs could expect support on appeal when try to enforce the limit.*
- *The BCC noted that a limit would need to be agreed by breed club members via club AGMs and added to the Code of Ethics, and that support would have to come from both stud dog and bitch owners.*

The workshops indicate that support exists for putting the proposal to Breed Club AGMs and adding it to the Code of Ethics, but all felt that enforcement would be difficult without the support of the Kennel Club.

ii. Alter show ring incentives

[See separate document] alter the influence of the show ring by increasing the likelihood of winning with dogs not over-used in the breed.

iii. Introduce semen banking

At both the EBCA and the BCCS workshops, people thought the idea of semen banks was worth taking forward as a way of reducing the impact of popular sires (BCCS) and preserving genetic diversity (EBCA).

It was suggested that information about semen that is currently stored should be made more widely available, to open up the possibilities of it being used to increase diversity.

1.2 Lack of understanding of COIs and inbreeding

The workshops identified confusion about the different calculation methods/sources for COIs (KC, BCX, individual breeders etc), which is making it more difficult for people to tackle inbreeding effectively.

Suggested actions on lack of understanding of COIs and inbreeding

i. Help breeders understand and make better use of COIs

Use an agreed system and source of data for calculating COIs and clarify the current confusion to help people to tackle inbreeding effectively.

ii. Provide incentives for reducing inbreeding

Offer classes and prize money to provide incentives for breeding dogs with low COIs.

1.3 Other suggested actions on loss of genetic diversity

A number of other actions were suggested which do not directly target the reasons that the groups identified for the loss of genetic diversity.

i. Encourage people to use a wider range of dogs at stud

All the groups had further ideas about encouraging a wider range of dogs to be used at stud and reducing the number of times each dog is used, including providing guidance and practical help for owners on handling stud dogs, providing widely-publicised information about available stud dogs with usage statistics and owner contact details, and possibly making greater use of siblings.

It was accepted that more information would be needed about the impact this would have on diversity.

ii. Bring in genetic diversity from outside the KC-registered breed

The BCCS workshop discussed the feasibility of opening the breed register to Working Beardies as a way of bringing genetic diversity into the registered breed and reducing the breed average COI.

Because of the limited time available, the main points from the discussion were about the incentives and safeguards wanted on both sides. Further work would be needed to find out whether it is possible to create a 'win-win' situation, from which both the registered breed and Working Beardies stand to gain.

iii. Educate new owners and their vets

The BCCS group proposed discouraging early neutering by providing information in puppy packs to encourage new owners and their vets to keep their dogs entire.

iv. Enlist Kennel Club support

It was suggested the JBLC approaches the KC to see how they can help in producing more genetic diversity, e.g. through restricting the registration of progeny of popular sires.

2. Adverse Impact of the Show Ring on Breed Type/Character, Popularity and Sustainability

The **influence/impact of the show ring** was identified as an important **underlying cause** of a range of other issues and concerns:

- people's desire to win is the main cause of the **over-use of popular sires** (see above)
- **judges decisions dictate breed type**; their interpretation of the standard was felt to be **weakening the original breed type and character**
- the **amount of coat is putting pet owners off the breed**
- the **amount of coat** can also disguise **faults in structure and movement**
- current **handling styles and presentation** – these make it possible to **disguise the temperament** of the dog and can **favour breeding a more passive temperament**.

Suggested actions

- i. Action on the **over-use of popular sires** was discussed in relation to **loss of genetic diversity**
- ii. The **amount of coat** was noted as a factor in the **decline in popularity** of the breed.
- iii. Suggested actions on **changes in breed type, character and temperament**
Action on the concerns relating to changes in breed type, character and temperament were not discussed by any of the workshop groups. As these concerns formed a significant proportion of the total it is important they are considered before deciding on next steps.

3. Lack of reliable health information, advice and guidance

In all the workshops, concerns were expressed about the lack of reliable health information and the difficulty of getting authoritative/ consistent 'plain English' advice and guidance on important health issues. The collective impact of these concerns is that **people are uncertain about whether health**

issues are increasing or not, and feel disempowered or frustrated at being unable to act on health risks or judge the risk of particular breeding choices. This has deterred some people from breeding, and caused others to leave the breed.

The **causes/underlying reasons** for this situation are:

- **lack of openness and honesty** about health issues
- **gaps in health reporting**
- **lack of consistent 'plain English' advice and guidance** on important health issues
- no individual or group has **responsibility for leading health improvement**.

One important consequence of the factors described above is that the **available information from health surveys, the open health registry and research reports is ignored/not acted on** because of perceptions that all these sources are subject to sample bias.

3.1 Lack of openness and honesty about health issues

This was **the single biggest concern in the health area**. It was discussed by two separate groups (at the SCBCC and NEBCC workshops) and indirectly touched on in the BCC and EBCA workshops. The group at the BCC workshop focused on the wider issue of why there is uncertainty about whether health issues are increasing or not, which is covered later.

The SCBCC workshop concluded that the issue was the result of **breeders and stud dog owners not fully understanding, recognising, or taking responsibility for health issues**.

The EBCA report noted that **those who were prepared to be honest potentially suffered**, and this is supported by the concerns recorded on post-its in all the workshops. These show a range of potent reasons why people are deterred from openly sharing information about health issues.

The NEBCC workshop provided useful information about what people think causes the problem, and what makes it difficult to solve.

The **underlying reasons for lack of openness and honesty about health issues** were:

- breeders **not asking** in case they are refused the sire as a result of being thought disrespectful by the stud dog owner
- fear of **scapegoating by the breed community**, especially on social media
- fear of **blame by pet owners** (and possibly litigation)
- **not wanting to start a witch-hunt** by being open and honest
- **peer pressure not to be open** because of the impact on the breed's reputation
- fear of **loss of reputation**
- fear of **discovering problems in their own line**
- **financial reasons** (puppy sales fall; stud fees fall)

Suggested actions

i. Checklist

Introduce an 'aide-memoire' or checklist setting out the expected exchange of health information between the two owners, with the option of agreeing that the information supplied (on one or both sides) was to remain confidential between them unless agreed otherwise. Although the majority of people felt openness was preferable, most accepted that in the short term this might not be possible and that the overriding priority was to ensure breeders and stud dog owners could reach an informed decision on health risks.

ii. Written information exchange

Another suggestion was to have a form with a list of questions including history of previous matings, to be completed and signed by both parties; however, this raised issues about legality and it was felt unlikely get practical buy-in.

3.2 Gaps in health reporting

The **causes/underlying reasons** identified were:

- some pet owners don't inform breeders about health issues
- the decision by a sizeable number of breeders and stud dog owners not to contribute to BeaCon
- concerns about the cost of health testing
- some breeders/stud dog owners don't submit x-rays for scoring

Suggested actions

i. Improve health reporting

All the workshop groups that focused on health information suggested actions to improve health reporting, particularly about auto-immune conditions and their incidence. Most groups also commented on the need to 'provide something back'.

Although everyone agreed there needed to be a simple, widely-available process to try and reach pet owners as well as show people, the suggested mechanism varied:

- collect during attendance at shows, club events, gatherings and walks
- via the JBLC, breed clubs, or BeaCon
- a possible link between BeaCon and BCX
- including the reporting procedure in puppy packs, relying on breeders to keep in touch with new owners
- approaching Jo Tucker to act as a link, asking anyone who contacted her with an auto-immune problem to complete a form and give it to the Breed Health Co-ordinator. This had the disadvantage that only reports on dogs with health problems would be received.

There was no overall consensus on the process to be used, and polarised views on BeaCon. A number of breeders had contributed to BeaCon in the early days and had strong negative views on it as a result of its approach at the time; others felt the system was not user-friendly enough (improved guidance has been provided for 2017) and did not provide enough back to UK users. Those with positive views noted breeders can register their puppies with BeaCon, which will keep in touch with the new owners to continue providing health information.

An approved confidential method is already in place for reporting of health problems to the JBLC Breed Health Co-ordinator. However, some felt that this contradicted health issues being reported to breeder, while others thought that if the breeder knew first, they may cover up the problem.

It was noted that before the Breed Health Co-ordinator could use the collected information to provide health information summaries an agreed approach would be needed, as it would be necessary to safeguard individual confidentiality.

ii. Gather information using a cohort study

Groups at two of the workshops (BCC and NEBCC) favoured gathering health information using some form of cohort study. The BCC workshop proposed a study involving 2 puppies per litter and covering all litters born over a 6 or 12 month period, with regular follow-up to record information on health and lifestyle from birth until death, or for 12 to 15 years of their life. It was argued this would solve people's perception that the results of existing breed health surveys/BeaCon were affected by participant bias.

It was mentioned that two other breeds were attempting something similar and advice could be taken from them. A disadvantage of the proposed study was the length of time before results are available.

The NEBCC group proposed inviting breeders and stud dog owners to submit information voluntarily to a Breed clubs database which would be published on the web. The information would include the history of the sire/dam and any puppies. The discussion was initially directed at providing health information about dogs/bitches to support breeders in making mating decisions, but later evolved into support for a more general a breed health cohort study.

Other Suggested actions

i. Increase DNA testing

Encourage breeders to include DNA testing kits in their puppy packs

ii. Provide more feedback on surveys and other initiatives

It was pointed out that providing more feedback would highlight the work being done and encourage breeders 'buy-in' and help reduce concerns about sample bias.

3.3 People are unable to get, or use, advice and guidance on key health issues

The **causes/underlying reasons** identified were:

- there is a **shortage of health information that ordinary people can understand**, especially about health conditions, genetics and the inheritance of genetic disease
- in some cases the available advice is **contradictory**
- there is **no single source for breed-related** health information and guidance.

Suggested actions

A number of actions were proposed for making health information easier to understand and simpler to locate.

- Simplify research reports and information about health conditions and genetics*** into a language that the lay person can understand
- Publicise the genetic guidance given to the breed*** to ensure breeders have it and understand it
- Make health information relevant to the breed easier to locate*** - ideally have a website that is accessible to everyone and has all the relevant health information and reports
- Consider how health information is communicated*** – use verbal as well as written information, e.g. invite a genetics expert to one of the breeders' meetings.
- Adopt a joint Code of Ethics***

3.4 No clear leadership

The **cause** identified was simply that the breed community has not decided who should provide leadership on health improvement.

There is a wider issue about how to provide 'governance' and leadership which will act in the best interests of the breed across all sections of the breed community – see Other Important Issues/Concerns.

4. The decrease in breed population

There was general agreement that the decrease in population is the result of **a reduction in both supply (fewer litters are being bred) and demand (fewer people want to buy a Beardie)**.

4.1 Reduction in supply (fewer litters being bred)

The causes identified were:

- **fewer litters** are being bred by **existing** breeders
- there are **fewer new breeders**.

The **underlying reasons** for the situation are:

- breeders are **getting older** and either **retiring from breeding** or **breeding less often**
- **fewer breeders** are in a position to keep **multiple stock**
- there are **fewer newcomers/pet owners** to become breeders

Other reasons acting as a barrier to action

- breeders are becoming **unwilling to breed** in case the puppies develop problems – breeders fear being blamed, or discovering problems in their own line (this affects both new and existing breeders)
- **lack of support for (and negative attitude towards) newcomers/pet owners** who want to show and/or breed

Suggested actions – see the concern about shortfall in the next generation of breed enthusiasts (the wider concern to which ‘fewer new breeders’ is linked)

4.2 Reduction in demand (decrease in breed popularity)

The **causes** identified were:

- **fashion trends**, including the rise in popularity of smaller breeds and crosses/designer breeds
- **raised public awareness of health issues** in pedigree breeds
- **changes in lifestyle and demography** mean fewer people want, or can manage, dogs with a high-maintenance coats like the Bearded
- **competition from working Beardies** – this particularly affects the younger buyers market, including people who want a Bearded for agility, flyball etc
- **reduced interest in showing** as a hobby.

Other factors reducing demand:

- **breeders’ approach to selling** – some breeders are being over-cautious about vetting potential owners (e.g. by ruling out broad categories of prospective buyers, such as people who work, or have children, some of whom may be suitable) and about informing them of the positives and negatives of the breed. As a result, potentially suitable owners are being turned away/put off.
- there are **too few Beardies about** for people (particularly the younger generation) to be familiar with them as a breed.

Suggested actions

These are actions to offset the fact that there are **too few Beardies about for people (particularly the younger generation) to be familiar with them** as a breed

i. Find new ways of raising public awareness of the breed and its character to ensure there is a market for puppies (NEBCC, EBCA)

Discover Dogs/All About Dogs is not enough; investigate other opportunities for making sure the breed is seen such as taking Beardies to local shows and fairs.

ii. Improve website promotion

Consider re-branding the JBLC and/or introduce a joint clubs puppy list

Consider advertising breed club puppy lists on websites/forums where people look for puppies.

Investigate the cost of improving the internet search ranking of club puppy lists, and introduce other cost-free ‘search engine optimisation’ methods, if not already being used.

iii. Convert owners to enthusiasts

Do more to attract people to the Club events to get them involved and interested in the breed.

5. The shortfall in newcomers to the breed who will form the next generation of owners, breeders and judges

The NEBCC group looked at this as part of its discussion on the decline in the Bearded population (although it had only limited time for the topic) and two other groups (EBCA and BCC) made brief comments; none dealt with the issue in depth.

Underlying causes – not discussed.

Other reasons:

- Lack of support for (and negative attitude towards) newcomers/pet owners who might want to show and/or breed

Suggested actions

i. Encourage new owners to get involved in showing

- provide information in puppy packs, including info about local clubs that offer puppy socialisation combined with ringcraft
- encourage new owners to come to shows (with their Beardies as NFC) and have a designated person to welcome them (use Facebook to request club nominee at each show)
- provide ongoing show ring mentoring, via sessions at shows (knowledge, e.g. planning progression from Open to Champ shows, plus practical handling/ringcraft advice)

ii. Provide mentoring and support for new breeders/stud dog owners

- provide encouragement, education, mentoring and support for breeders and stud dog owners, including 'small time' breeders not involved in the show ring, and consider a 'buddy' network.

6. Other Important Issues and Concerns

A number of points which appear likely to be of long-term importance were not discussed in the workshops because of time constraints.

i. Changes in breed type, character and temperament

These concerns form a significant proportion of the total and it is important they are considered when developing the long-term plan. Some of the points raised are a reflection of different preferences relating to type, but there were enough references to 'bad' temperament, aggressive and nervous behaviour to indicate a move away from the good temperament that Beardies are known for.

ii. Breed information resources: maintaining Irena's Pedigree Database

Irena's pedigree database has been an invaluable resource to the breed since 2001. It was suggested that unless arrangements are already in place, the JBLC/clubs should consider how to ensure the future of the database when Irena gives it up.

iii. Seeing the complete picture

The SCBCC workshop included 'seeing the complete picture' in its list of top issues, highlighting the lack of feedback/information from those that are not involved in showing and/or breeding. These groups are likely to have a different perspective on the breed and have a relevant stake in its future.

iv. 'Governance' and leadership

Although the JBLC already provides a forum for liaison between the clubs, it was noted in the workshops the JBLC was effectively a closed shop not accessible to non club members or the wider breed community.

It was suggested that some other form of recognised central group was needed to provide 'governance' and leadership and act in the best interests of the breed across all sections of the breed community.

The possibility of a Breed Council was raised, although this had similar disadvantages to the JBLC.

D HOW WILL THE WORKSHOP FINDINGS BE TAKEN FORWARD?

The workshops were designed to gather information on people's concerns and draw on their collective ideas to find practical solutions to them. The JBLC and clubs agreed the workshop findings would be used in developing a long-term plan for the breed, along with any other relevant information and advice.

In the next stage of the process the JBLC/clubs will:

- make the results of the workshops widely known to people in the breed community
- use the results and other advice/information to identify what positive future prospects to aim for and the priorities for action
- prepare a draft strategy/long-term plan and consider what kind of organising and leadership arrangements are needed for future 'stewardship' of the breed.

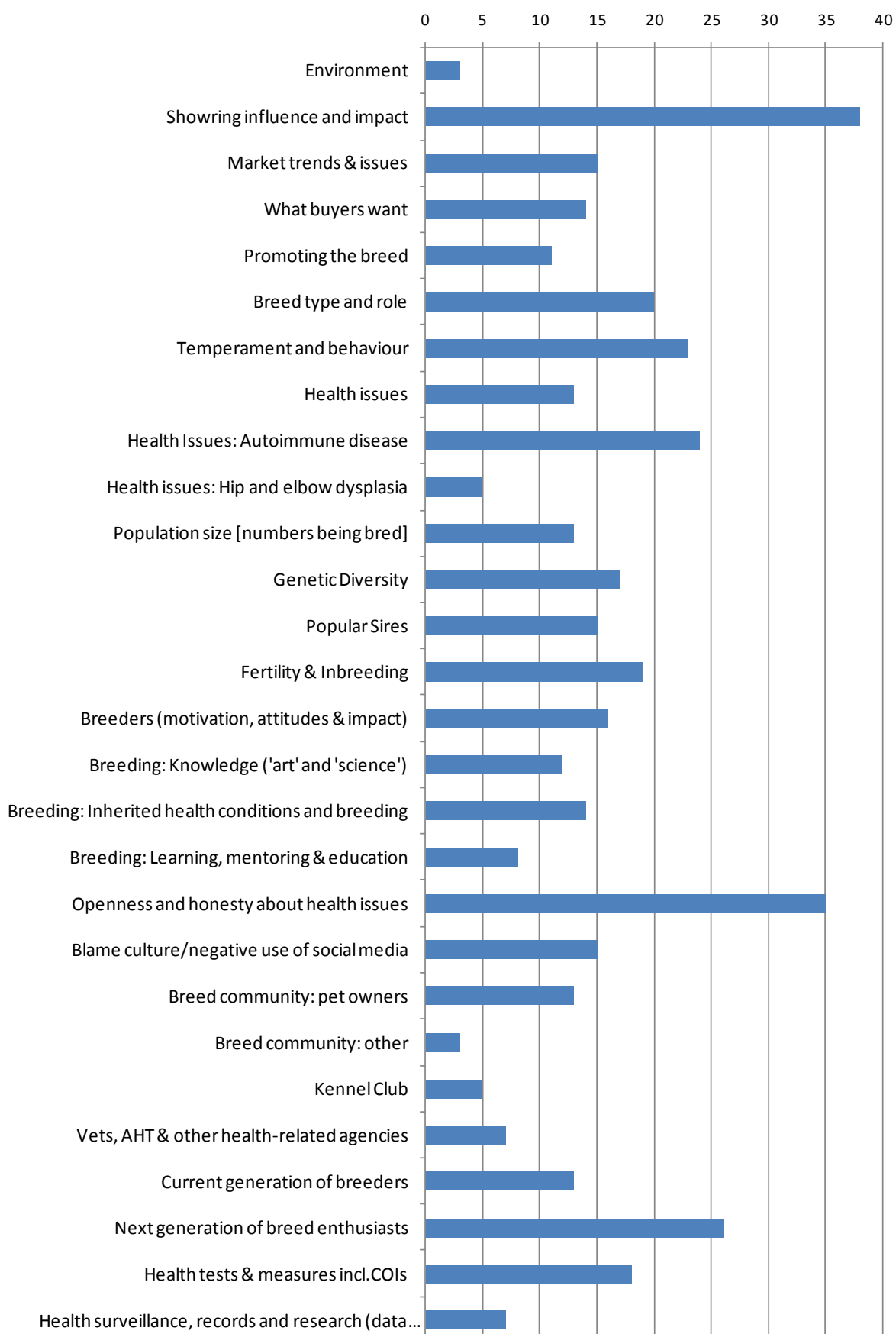
(March – May; action by JBLC and clubs)

An open meeting to discuss the strategy/long-term plan and hear expert advice on it will then take place
(arranged for 13th May)

Anne Robson

Appendix

Chart 2: Concerns/Issues by Topic (% of people with this concern)



The main issues/concerns and how they interrelate

