



media *release*

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**ANIMAL HEALTH TRUST AND THE KENNEL CLUB
ADDRESS GENETIC PROBLEMS IN PEDIGREE DOGS**
The Kennel Club Genetics Centre at the AHT issues mid-term report

The Kennel Club Genetics Centre (KCGC) at the Animal Health Trust (AHT) has issued an update report highlighting the significant progress the centre has made.

Since being established, in March 2009, the KCGC has focussed on helping dog breeders to reduce or eradicate inherited disease from their breeds. This has been achieved through the development and provision of essential tools which minimise the risk of breeding affected puppies.

Cathryn Mellersh, Head of Canine Genetics at the AHT, said: "The creation of the KCGC has been a huge step forward into inherited disease research in dogs. The Centre has helped to focus attention on this important area and without the support of the Kennel Club and all the various breed clubs and individual breeders, we wouldn't have made so much progress."

Five different mutations associated with diseases in 20 breeds of dog have been identified. For all of these mutations, DNA tests have been developed at the AHT. Breeders are now able to find out whether their dog is clear or carries the mutation by supplying DNA to the AHT genetic services laboratory through a simple cheek

swab. Thanks to the development of these tests the carrier status of more than 11,000 dogs, in the UK and across the world, has been established.

Caroline Kisko, Kennel Club Communications Director said: "By committing £1.2 million to the Kennel Club Genetics Centre to investigate the mutations responsible for inherited diseases, the Kennel Club Charitable Trust has helped make big strides towards eradicating inherited diseases across a number of breeds. The Genetics Centre is making excellent progress in helping to enable breeders to ensure that only healthy dogs are used in future breeding plans.

"The funding given by the Charitable Trust is also helping scientists at the Genetics Centre to conduct research into developing wider breeding strategies to improve the general health of dogs and maintain genetic diversity in our pedigree breeds."

As well as individual dogs, whole breeds are also benefiting. The development of estimated breeding values (EBVs) enables whole dog populations to be evaluated for the risk of inherited disease – even if individuals haven't been scanned or DNA tested themselves. The Centre currently has EBV projects underway looking at hip and elbow dysplasia in Labrador Retrievers and syringomyelia and mitral valve disease in Cavalier King Charles Spaniels.

Maintenance of genetic diversity is another important issue being addressed by the Centre, one which lies at the heart of the popular Mate Select service recently launched by the Kennel Club on its website.

Sarah Blott, Head of Quantitative Genetics at the AHT, said: "The development of the Mate Select service is an important step forward and, I think, in time its value to dog breeders will become more and more obvious as we create more tools to add to it.

“In terms of breeding solutions, I hope the service will become a one-stop shop for all, enabling dog breeders to ensure, as far as possible, the good health of the puppies they produce.”

The KCGC set out to investigate a number of inherited diseases between 2009 and 2013. There is still much for the Centre to achieve. It is currently investigating the genetics of a wide range of inherited conditions, including idiopathic epilepsy in Border Collies and hereditary cataract and progressive retinal atrophy in many breeds, including Siberian Huskies, Miniature Schnauzers and Tibetan Spaniels.

For further information on the progress of the KCGC, dog breeders are encouraged to download the mid-term report for free from either the AHT or Kennel Club websites.

Ends

For further information, please contact:

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Photographs:

An image of the front cover of the report is available on request from the AHT press office.

Images of some of the breeds mentioned in the report are also available.

Additional notes:

- The Animal Health Trust is an independent charity, employing over 200 scientists, vets and support workers. It aims to improve the health and welfare of horses, dogs and cats through research. It also provides specialist referral services and continuous education to vets. Visit the website at www.aht.org.uk
- The Kennel Club Genetics Centre is led by Dr Cathryn Mellersh and Dr Sarah Blott, two of the AHT's genetics experts. Both have pioneered screening tests to identify a dog's genetic status and minimise the risk of producing affected puppies

- The Kennel Club Charitable Trust has donated over £5m since its formation to help fund research into dog diseases and to canine support and welfare charities. Money made by the Kennel Club, through events such as Crufts, goes back into the Kennel Club Charitable Trust and into education and health initiatives to help all dogs.