**Will a £10 Licence Fee save us from losing 8000 judges because of the JCF?**

The Kennel Club’s original decision to spend £0.5 million on the implementation of the Judges Competency Framework (JCF) would be classed by most ordinary people as a major investment decision. It would take the average UK worker 18 years to earn that amount in his or her salary. You would therefore think that such an investment decision had been carefully considered.

It does seem incredible that the KC Board could dream up such a controversial policy change as the JCF and unleash it on every current judge and prospective judges for the years ahead without apparently understanding the financial implications. With a set-up cost of £0.5 million and annual running costs of £200k, this looks increasingly like a serious case of financial mismanagement. KC members should be asking how the business case for the JCF was approved and by whom. The Board includes a number of successful business people and it is inconceivable that any of them would have invested the sums being demanded for the JCF without considerable and detailed scrutiny of the facts.

Whether the recent announcement to merge the IT element of the JCF with another KC IT project makes this investment decision better or worse is open to debate. Making an already complex IT project bigger and take longer hardly seems a recipe for cost savings.

Did not one member of the Finance Committee or Board ask the basic question “how many judges do we have?”. Did they blindly accept that “it was too difficult” to calculate the number of judges who would be affected by the JCF (and who would be expected to fund it)? Even a basic calculation of the number of judges who award CCs would have been readily available from the KC’s own Find A Judge database. Was that asked for and considered by the Board?

Was consideration ever given by the Board to whether the rumoured expenditure of £500,000 on the new IT system could be argued to be ‘a transaction in the normal course of business’. Why? Because the KC’s Articles of Association say at Clause 6.2 “Except for: (1) a transaction in the normal course of business; or (2) a purchase, sale or exchange of securities quoted on a recognised Stock Exchange made on the recommendation of the Kennel Club’s advisors previously given in writing; the Board shall not have power to act in respect of any transaction involving a value on excess of £100,000 without the prior approval of the Voting Members in general meeting.”.

With so many unanswered questions and so many concerns expressed by judges who will become the victims of the JCF, I decided to find some answers. My original plan was to draw up a presentation that I would consider worthy of consideration for investment of half a million pounds in a business proposition. After analysing all the judging lists within the Utility, Pastoral and Gundog groups I feel that it is a reasonable assumption that the other four groups would follow those of the Utility and Pastoral, with the Gundog being the sole exception. The findings of my study clearly indicate that the number of UK judges on A, B and C judging lists with all duplicated names removed stands at 13496.

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| **Fig. 1 - Analysis of A, B and C Lists:**  Utility Group: 3017 Judges - with all duplicates deleted = 1778.  Pastoral Group: 3097 Judges - with all duplicates deleted = 1889.  Gundog Group: 5904 Judges - with all duplicates deleted = 3206  Total Judges: 12018 and with all duplicates deleted = 6873  Extrapolating across the remaining Groups, assuming they follow the Pastoral/Utility pattern and allowing for duplications, the estimate of individual judges across all 7 Groups is 13496. |

From that baseline, it is easy to calculate that, with the originally proposed JCF Fee of £26, the KC could expect an income of around £350,000 p.a. This does assume, of course, that all judges choose to participate in this ill-conceived policy. We already know that is a false assumption. Based on a poll I ran in 2017 (Dog Breeders and Exhibitors Point of View), 8265 judges would not join the Academy/JCF, leaving just 5225 judges available across all 7 Groups. Just how many of those 8265 are eligible for the £10 concession and will still choose not to join at £10 p.a. is anyone’s guess (and no doubt that’s exactly what the Board has done – “guess”). Regrettably, I fear the Board has failed to grasp that the reluctance of many judges to participate is not solely due an annual membership fee, or licence fee, whatever name it is given. The fact that we hear of judges now scrambling to get approved for more breeds and Group appointments before they have to comply with the JCF should be a big clue to how much they dislike the new system.

While the numbers and finance are both significantly important, one must never lose sight of the fact that that one of the most valuable assets the canine world possesses is its judges without whom everything would collapse in double fast time. The fact that the majority of judges intending to “retire” as a result of the JCF are breed specialists should be ringing alarm bells with the KC Board and the wider KC membership who will be held accountable for this loss.

The Judges Working Party designed the first seminars back in 1998, aimed at breed judging and focused on Kennel Club Rules and Regulations and Conformation and Movement. Did anyone on the Board ask for any evidence before deciding the efforts of the past 20 years had been a failure? Now, after twenty years of “waste”, I fear we are all to be subjected to more of the same that will see me writing another damning article in twenty years’ time.

It doesn't have to be that way, though. There have been plenty of discussions and practical ideas proposed that would lead to the improvements exhibitors are calling for, without the need for an expensive white elephant IT system and a levy on judges.

I believe all educational materials should be available to everyone right from the point where they start in our wonderful hobby and they should be free of charge. Breed Clubs must face up to their responsibilities as guardians of their breed’s future and they should be the ones funding the development of their educational resources. Of course, a few of the smaller breeds might struggle to finance such developments but this need not be prohibitive given some creative fundraising and support from the KC Educational Trust.

Breed Clubs should retain responsibility for creating and maintaining their Judging Lists and the KC should deal with the accusations of closed shops through more effective monitoring and regulation. Judging lists don’t need to be on an expensive central KC IT system but they do need to be in a consistent format and available on Breed Club websites.

There are ways to relieve the KC of the bulk of the JCF’s set-up costs and reduce the ongoing maintenance costs. These would avoid the need to levy a fee on judges at all and, more importantly, avoid the loss of over 8000 judges. Let’s be clear, the £10 concessionary Licence Fee is a U-turn. It may be dressed-up as “listening to stakeholders” but if anyone from the JCF Working Party had bothered to ask the stakeholders in the first place, a U-turn wouldn’t have been needed because they wouldn’t have designed and launched what is widely seen to be complicated and bureaucratic.

Does the JCF Working Party and the current Board wish to be remembered for successes or failures? Should you decide to plough ahead whatever the outcome and despite all the evidence, then I think the time has come for the KC membership to call a halt. At this year’s AGM, they must stand up for everyone else living in the real dog world, but outside of KC membership. Please now listen and recognise that there is a vision for a better way; one which brings all of today’s judges with you and paves the way for tomorrow’s judges as well.

Peter Clifton