

# THE SWEDISH KENNEL CLUB'S BREED SPECIFIC INSTRUCTIONS (BSI) PROGRAMME.

Data compiled 2009-2013

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The Swedish Kennel Club has instituted a routine programme entitled the BSI (Breed Specific Instructions) regarding exaggerations in pedigree dogs.

The BSI are the result of inventories made possible through extensive collaboration between dog show judges, breed clubs, veterinary surgeons and supported by veterinary health insurance statistics. These five factors constitute the basis for the selection of listed breeds and for the written directions for each breed. The structure of the inventory allows for a continuous follow up and dynamic revisions of the BSI.

The BSI complement the published breed standards of 46 high profile breeds in Sweden which have been evaluated as being at risk for health and soundness due to the various exaggerations in breed type which may have been preferred by show judges and thus selected as breeding stock. All judges appointed for any of the 46 breeds at shows arranged by the Swedish Kennel Club and its regional clubs, are informed by letter before each show about the BSI and they are also briefed at the actual shows. The BSI are recommendations and not rules so that the integrity and discretion of judges remain fully respected. The judges are asked to note the various BSI issues which they observe in their individual critiques on the dogs, and to account for their findings on a written form submitted to the SKK.

These reports eventually make up part of the basis for updating of the BSI list and are also communicated to the relevant breed clubs which share responsibility for the issues listed in the BSI document. 10175 of these accumulated evaluation reports, now form the basis for this article.

BSI routines have been applied to all official SKK shows since 2009. A surprisingly great loyalty and interest was able to be established almost immediately from all stakeholders: judges, the regional kennel clubs, breed clubs and so on. Since the beginning more than 10 000 evaluation forms have been collected and make up the base for the experience described here; some of the data have been processed statistically.

The first intention of the BSI programme has been achieved, that was to raise the show judges' awareness of such health and soundness risks which were related to type exaggerations in show dogs. The routine includes an evaluation of each dog within ordinary ring procedures vis a vis the areas of risk listed for each of the BSI breeds and giving a written report on these observations.

The positive outcome of these quickly established routines has thus created a *good possibility in theory at least* to influence the breeding of sounder and healthier purebred dogs. This outcome always depends on judges complying with the

recommendation made – namely to give preference to dogs without type-related exaggerations – and on the fact that breeders ensure that winning dogs are the ones preferred as breeding stock.

A recent FCI decree informs judges to consider not only the likely effect of their decisions on future breeding but also stresses that the soundness of dogs shown, will provide the base of individual breed gene pools for the future. Dog shows thus no longer only provide the instrument for evaluating the quality of today's breeding but also points toward the future breeding.

Time is still too short to notice or to evaluate any definite improvements regarding health and soundness in the 46 individual breeds listed in the BSI. The accumulated data however do reveal some important and interesting trends which are of importance and will be of future interest providing the areas of risk mentioned actually are appropriate and that the judges have complied properly with the programme and have assessed the exhibits correctly according to BSI instructions.

### **APPROPRIATENESS OF THE LIST OF BREEDS SELECTED**

Judges were not only asked to report their observations regarding breed specific issues (the areas of risk) mentioned in the BSI document but also to state their opinion as to whether the individual breed should in fact be listed or not. Judges were asked to base their opinions on their general (global) experience of the breed and not just on what they had observed at the particular show on which they were reporting.

The judges' reports confirmed that the majority of the listed breeds had been appropriately selected for inclusion in the BSI programme and this was most evident regarding the brachycephalic and chondrodystrophic breeds. Figure 1.

A most important finding is that there initially was a drop in the reported BSI issues (from 46 to 42% statistically significant). This finding thus contrasts with the fact that the judges at the same time consider most of the listed breeds were motivated to remain listed.

Fig 2 shows the results for the listed individual brachycephalic breeds and focus more clearly the discrepancy between the amount of observed BSI issues (green) and the judges' opinion (yellow) as to whether the breed should be considered as a high profile risk breed.

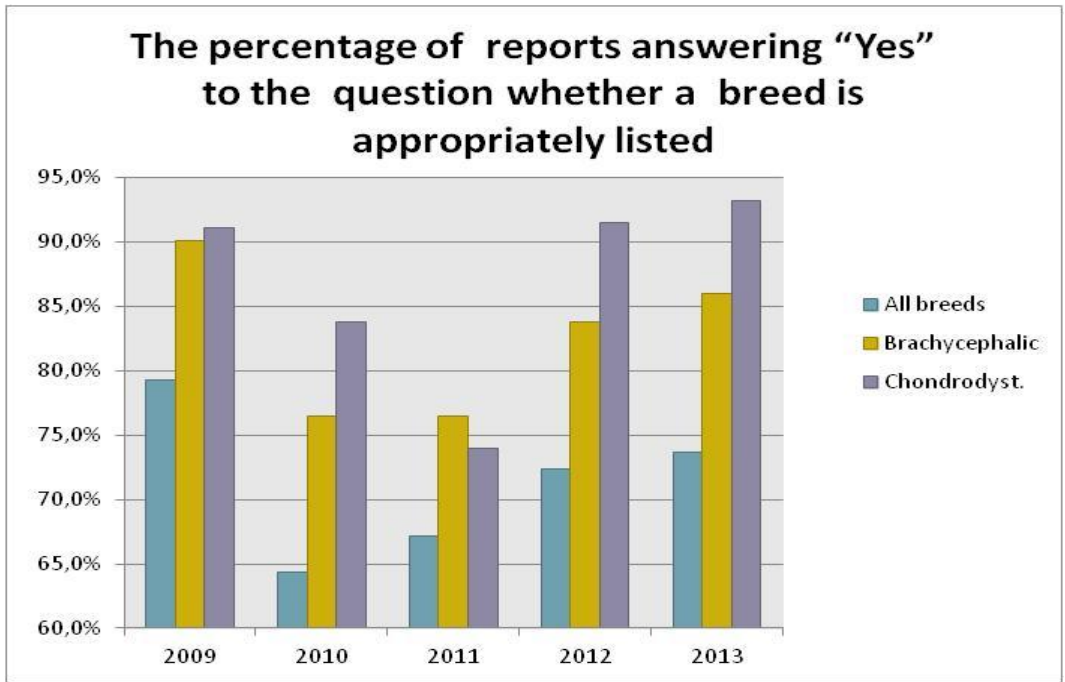


Fig 1

These results seem to indicate that the population of exhibited dogs is rather “sounder” than what the judges consider about the *general* global population of these breeds; and that the focus on the issues listed influenced the exhibitors choice of dogs selected for showing

These findings will be considered together in the revisions of the BSI along with the other four BSI founding pillars motivating the breeds to be listed.

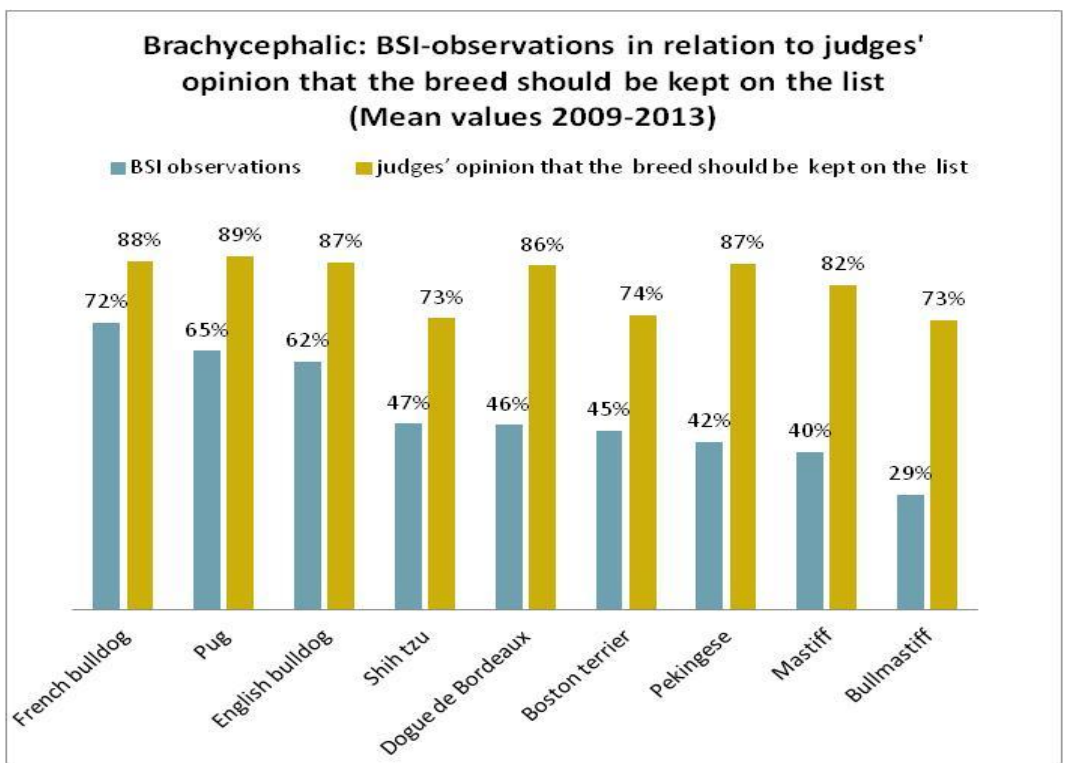


Fig 2

## **DIVERGENT OPINIONS**

In about 7% of cases, judges had not filled out the evaluation forms in a complete and satisfactory way, mostly foreign judges who may not have been given sufficient information prior to the show. Only about 1 % of judges expressed an overall negative view of the BSI concept and considered the project unnecessary or ineffective for the purpose of protecting purebred dogs against the health hazards of exaggerations in show dogs.

One important observation is that in as many as 15% (mean) of the reports, the judges had very adequately observed, noted and reported according to the instructions but had actively avoided to give a statement about whether a breed ought to be listed or not. Some explained that their personal experience of that particular breed was too limited to back up an opinion on this and that they had not found any of the BSI issues among the dogs entered. A few judges had incorrectly believed that the BSI programme was an inventory of occurrence of faults rather than what it is actually intended to be – namely an investigation of judges' opinions in general about the "high risk" status of the relevant breeds.

The obvious diminishing occurrence of noted BSI issues is easily understood as being partly due to the increasing awareness among exhibitors and their regard and respect for the BSI concept. The BSI programme and its documentation and breed lists are all public information. This points out an increasing awareness of the risks of exaggerations – not only for competing at dog shows but hopefully in general also – including in the planning of breeding programmes.

## **RISK LEVEL GROUPS DROPPED**

Since all the 46 breeds can in no way be considered equal as far as risk for health problems due to exaggerations are concerned, we initially decided on a sub grouping of the breeds in three categories. This was abandoned since it does not comply with the real intention of the project and also unfortunately adversely stressed some individual breeds and thus seriously disturbed our cooperation with the breed clubs. The sub grouping process was omitted in 2010.

A detailed investigation shows that in the most highly profiled risk group of seven breeds, where the compliance of judges with the BSI programme is of most importance, the reports were satisfactorily and carefully carried out by judges in 90% of cases. In the 10% where judges failed to carry out the process correctly (due to inadequate examinations and summing up) these were mostly foreign judges where information provided had not been good enough.

We have come to the conclusion that the benefits of any sub grouping focussing on the most heavily burdened risk breeds, is not necessary but is instead in fact risky for the programme since it is destructive of cooperation with the relevant breed clubs, causes stigmatisation of the breeds and jeopardises the preventive intention of the programme.

## CHANGES IN THE LEVELS OF GRADINGS (CK AND DISQUALIFIED)

We have examined the number of awarded CKs (CC Quality Gradings) in the 20 breeds which had previously been placed in the two sub groups estimated to be of higher risk for exaggerations.

We compared the numbers of CKs from 2006 (before the BSI started) and found a strongly significant drop initially in all 20 breeds.

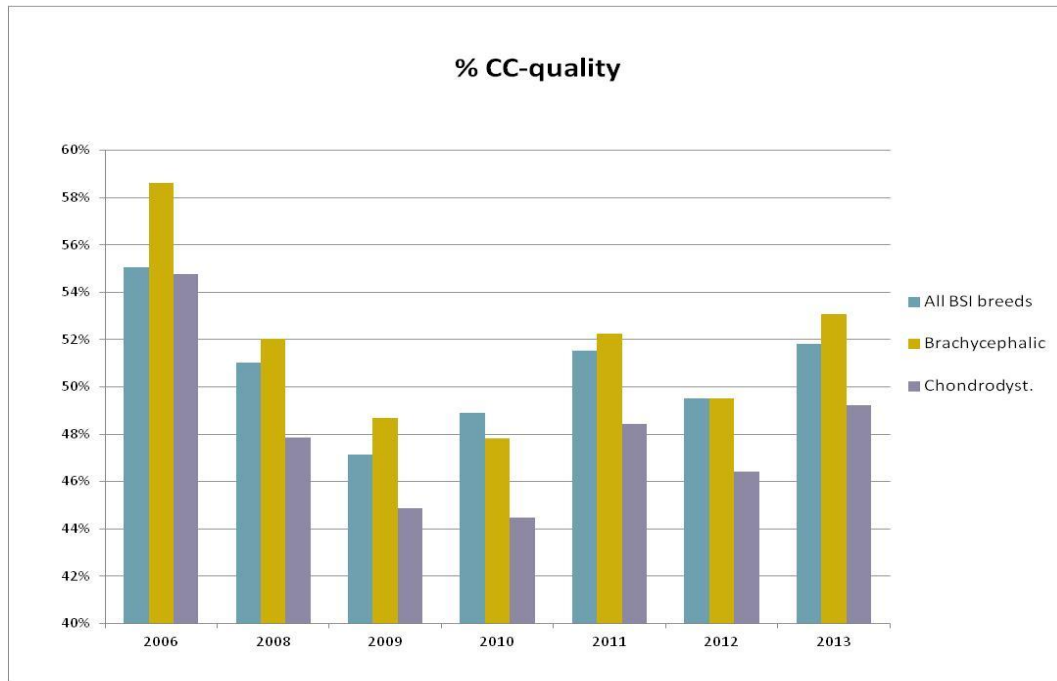


Fig 3

The drop was already proving significant from 2008 – which can be interpreted as due to the introduction of the BSI concept at a General Judges Conference held in 2007. From 2011 there is again a recovery of the CK awarding.

The drop can be put down to the only absolutely explicit instruction to judges regarding quality grading in the BSI - namely: *Judges are requested to consider health aspects to a higher degree than previously particularly when awarding CK or not.*

The rise in the relative numbers of CKs seen in 2011 and on can preferably be interpreted as the effect of exhibitors selecting mostly excellent dogs to be entered at shows.

The number of dogs of the BSI breeds being awarded “Disqualified” has increased significantly since the introduction of the BSI 2009. (The grade disqualified related to temperamental/mental issues are not considered in the figures below):

2006	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
27	54	101	73	86	67	52

## THE BREED CLUBS

It was surprising in a positive way to find that most of **the breed clubs** with responsibility for the BSI breeds selected, welcomed the programme as an adequate way of protecting breeds from risks arising from exaggerations.

The breed clubs are of great importance. The clubs are receiving copies of all of the judges' evaluation reports and also the written individual critiques and are asked to form their own opinions about how adequately judges are respecting the problems in their breeds and what kind of problems are actually observed in the show rings

Continuous dialogue between the breed clubs and the central BSI group enables consensus to be reached about the specific risk areas for each breed and how these should be expressed in the BSI document.

The respectful and two-way co-operation in the continuous dialogue between the BSI committee and the breed clubs means that there are no authoritarian decrees. We believe that this is essential to achieve a positive outcome. The text for the various issues is thus written in cooperation with each breed club. The BSI programme would be meaningless if there was not a growing consensus between breeders and show judges regarding the problems and risks existing among today's show dogs due to breeding policies and tendencies towards exaggerations.

## A SCIENTIFIC APPROACH

The initial ambition to formulate an inventory of the occurrence of exaggerations and deviations in the listed breeds could not have been achieved if judges' reports had not been precise enough or if dogs with BSI issues were diminishingly entered at shows! The success of the system thus reflects an agreement amongst breeders and exhibitors, with the goal of the project, and a decrease in the acceptance of dogs of extreme type for showing (and hopefully also for breeding?).

The justification for listing a breed in the system is its relative weight in the overall mix of material made up of the five pillars. A precise score system to define this has not been possible since the five different factors do not easily allow comparison. (Three of them are based on numerical data and two on experienced interpretations.) It is thus not possible **to prove** whether or not a breed should be listed, but the depth of material involved does create **a good enough base to justify** the assessments made.

## OVERALL REFLECTIONS

The success of the preventive aim of the BSI project - namely to improve the breeding of pedigree dogs - is certainly not yet possible to assess at this early stage. Such an evaluation cannot be done until several generations have passed. Significant changes in levels of quality grading and observations of risk issues, are however possible to extract from the analysis of the increasing volume of judges' evaluations available, and the records from shows as shown above.

It was surprisingly easy to introduce the project and the routines. This reflects the great loyalty to prevention and improvement among Swedish breeders and show

judges and also good timing in relation to general public awareness of the health risks involved in breeding dogs. It should be pointed out that this Swedish initiative was started well before the BBC film about unsoundness in purebred dogs and the alleged potential negative influence of the dog show sport.

Many judges have pointed out that it has now become easier to handle and deal with the exaggeration issues mentioned in the BSI – there is now a better means of dealing with it including the vocabulary – in spite of the fact that the BSI does not in any way create a manual directly connecting a certain fault to a specific quality award. The BSI listing is complementary to the breed standard, nothing more and the basic principle is that of recommendations that do not dictate explicit rules on how precisely to evaluate and assess the BSI issues.

The BSI's influence on levels of quality gradings in the high risk breeds is being observed. There was as shown above, a tendency for a reduction of the numbers of CK quality gradings in the BSI listed breeds in general and in brachycephalics and chondrodystropics in particular between 2006 (before the BSI) and 2009 - the catch up after 2010 points to an improvement in the population entered at shows.

## **NEGATIVES**

A few negative consequences have been noted: A few judges have however totally disregarded the BSI instructions. Some have incorrectly used the BSI to justify disqualifications and a few have given preference to poor typed "sounder" dogs to dogs of excellent type. The BSI initiative must not lead to an impoverishment of breed type or an emphasis on fault judging. There is of course always an inbuilt potential conflict between judging for soundness and judging for type. This stresses the need to respect the view that *"A dog that is obviously healthy and sound is not an excellent breeding result if it is not of excellent type"*. – There is always a risk of emphasising the *"inspector"* approach – which is easier than *judging*.

The art of judging dogs must not be allowed to deteriorate and judging dogs should never be primarily of a condemning nature.

## **ADDENDUM**

The main reason for the positive outcome of this project so far, is likely to be its good timing coinciding with the general public's opinion that these problems must be dealt with. It must succeed not just for the sake of the dogs and the breeds but also in counteracting the politically based questioning of the sport of dog showing as leading to cruelty to animals because of the argument that unsound and unhealthy breed hyper-typical traits are preferred at dog shows.

The depth of the information and the preparatory work, the continuous two-way dialogue with the breed clubs, and the updating of veterinary medical data are essential for the positive outcome so far - as are the structured information being given to judges and the follow-up of their written detailed opinions and observations. It should be pointed out that breed protective programs that only give instructions to judges and do not ask for structured reports have shown to be less likely to be successful in emphasising specific areas of risk into judges' routine actions. It has been obvious that asking for these more sophisticated undertakings by judges has

been appreciated by the majority of them since their knowledge and opinions have been acknowledged and recognised.

The basic principle of entrusting show judges to evaluate the soundness of a dog – without allowing such assessment to develop into judges becoming amateur veterinary surgeons - is another cornerstone for the likely success of the BSI system.

Starting in 2012 the five countries of the NKU (Nordic Kennel Union) have investigated the possibility of harmonising the BSI program for Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden and from 2014 a common BSI is created. The cooperation has resulted in a diminution of the number of breeds to 39 and a revision of the details of the breed related instructions and some widening of the general information.

The intention is to introduce the BSI internationally and stressing that the principle of the BSI is possible to apply in most countries but the detailed listing of high profile breeds must be decided nationally.