

Alex Mahon
Chief Executive
Channel 4

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Via e-mail: amahon@channel4.co.uk

Dear Ms Mahon,

We are a group of veterinary professionals who are deeply disturbed by what we continue to see at the world's largest dog show, Crufts: the breeding and judging of dogs primarily for their looks, at great detriment to their well-being.

The arbitrary breed standards that the competition's judges use to rate the dogs call for them to be bred for extremely exaggerated physical features, regardless of the damage to their health. As a result, dogs are suffering. For example, dachshunds' unnaturally elongated spines and short legs predispose them to crippling intervertebral disc disease. Shar Peis' wrinkled skin makes them susceptible to itchy, painful skin infections and eyelid deformities. German shepherds, once renowned for their athleticism, now commonly suffer from debilitating hip dysplasia and painful arthritis, because a sloped back with shorter hind legs has become a fashionable look that wins at dog shows.

English bulldogs continue to be bred with unnaturally flat faces for no reason other than aesthetics. This can cause them to develop brachycephalic airway syndrome – a condition characterised by severe breathing difficulties. Worryingly, according to research published last year by VetCompass, most bulldog guardians consider breathing difficulties "normal". This perception no doubt comes, in part, from dog shows like Crufts, which normalise and even glamorise painful, life-threatening genetic conditions.

The BBC stopped airing Crufts in 2008 after revelations about the prevalence of hereditary defects among pedigree dogs, including some Crufts prize winners. Channel 4 must now do the same – any event that rewards the deliberate breeding of deformed and disabled dogs is not worthy of your airtime.

Sincerely,

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