



THE BRITISH EQUESTRIAN FEDERATION
EQUINE ETHICS AND WELFARE POLICY

21ST REVISION

1 January 2025

BACKGROUND

Equine welfare is of paramount importance to the British Equestrian Federation (BEF) and its Member Bodies. Equine welfare must not be subordinated to commercial or competitive influences. In all situations, all members are committed to promoting the highest standards of care for equines.

Ensuring the wellbeing of horses is everyone's responsibility. The BEF and its Member Bodies will collaborate to reduce the risk of equine suffering through:

1. Applying a welfare-centric approach to regulation and activity planning
2. Providing information and education on best practice for those involved with horses, and
3. Adopting a robust response to any forms of mistreatment with effective sanctions for prohibited behaviour

All Participants are required to comply with this Policy. All Participants have an obligation to report concerns of abuse or mistreatment to their Member Body, the BEF, or statutory authorities.

The Animal Welfare Act 2006, and the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 ("the 2006 Acts") make it an offence to cause physical or mental suffering to a horse if the person knew (or could be expected to know) that the animal would suffer as a result. This could be due to action or omission.

The 2006 Acts place additional responsibility on the keepers and owners of horses to ensure that their needs are met, including;

- A suitable environment
- A suitable diet
- To exhibit normal behaviour patterns
- To be housed with, or apart from, other animals (as applicable)
- To be protected from pain, injury, suffering and disease

This Policy and Code of Conduct is based on the 2006 Acts, supported by the five (5) domains model and the three (3) essential needs model.

A person responsible for a horse who permits another person to cause unnecessary suffering will commit an offence. If they fail to take reasonable steps to prevent the suffering, they are also likely to commit an offence.

The DEFRA Code of Practice for the Welfare of Horses, Ponies, Donkeys and their Hybrids is available here: [DEFRA Code of Practice 2018](#)

SCOPE

Within this Policy, "equine" or "horse" refers to horses, ponies, donkeys (asses), hinnies, mules and any other equids.

Within this Policy, "abuse" means an action or omission that causes or is likely to cause suffering, unnecessary discomfort, or pain to a horse. For example, this may include (but is not limited to):

- To compete a lame, injured, or exhausted horse;
- To abnormally sensitise or desensitise any part of a horse;
- To leave a horse without access to key elements of its wellbeing, for example food, water or exercise;
- To use any device or equipment which causes, or may cause, pain to a horse when knocking down a jump;
- To beat a horse or use any kind of shock device;
- To use spurs or a bit excessively

All Participants are bound by this Policy. A “Participant” is defined as any person who;

1. Is a member of a Member Body, an employee, office holder, contractor or volunteer of the BEF or Member Body,
2. Is involved in the management, administration or preparation of equestrian events or equestrian activities,
3. Is the owner, lessee, or keeper of an equine,
4. Any person working with or supporting any equines participating (or preparing to participate) in activities under authority of the FEI, BEF, or its Member Bodies. For example this includes (but is not limited to) coaches, vets, agents, officials.

A Participant may be an adult or a child.

All Participants are deemed to have agreed to be bound by this Policy, and submit to the authority of the BEF and/or relevant Member Body to enforce this Policy, as a condition of their participation in these activities.

This includes submitting to any consequences for breaches, and to the jurisdiction of the hearing panels to hear and determine cases and appeals under this Policy, as identified in the BEF Rulebook.

Participants are responsible for making themselves aware of this policy, and for complying with it. Conduct prohibited under this policy may also constitute a criminal offence and/or be a breach of other applicable regulations and laws.

ROLE OF THE BEF AND MEMBER BODIES

The BEF will ensure that;

- Everyone involved with the BEF is aware of the Equine Welfare Code of Conduct, and their responsibilities in looking after horses.
- There is clear signposting available for relevant support and advice.
- Everyone involved with the Policy knows how to report a concern.
- Any concerns reported are responded to appropriately and promptly.
- Confidential, detailed, and accurate records are maintained and stored in line with our Data Protection Policy and Procedures.

- The BEF and its Member Bodies cooperate with relevant authorities taking action to ensure the wellbeing of horses, such as the Police, RSPCA, or Local Authorities.
- There is effective information sharing in place related to equine welfare cases for the BEF and its Member Bodies.

Each Member Body shall;

- Formally adopt the BEF Equine Ethics and Welfare policy, procedures, and guidelines to achieve a consistent approach across all Member Bodies. Specific variations will be in conformity with best practice and/or legal requirements.
- Ensure participants are aware of and formally adopt all appropriate policies, procedures, and guidelines.
- Monitor the implementation of these policies and procedures and feedback to the BEF on an annual basis.
- Empower officials with professional development and training, increase accountability for standards, and implement effective enforcement to make sure equine welfare is paramount at events.
- Develop and establish their culture and approach to equine welfare.
- Respond to reports of concern and maintain case reports to allow effective oversight of equine welfare.

The BEF shall;

- Provide strategic guidance on equine ethics and welfare,
- Collaborate with Member Bodies in managing reports of concern, overseeing case management as necessary,
- Coordinate a central database of concerns/incidents,
- Provide guidance on implementing and managing appropriate disciplinary and appeals procedures for breaches,
- Ensure incidents are appropriately reported and referred out in accordance with BEF guidelines,
- Coordinate the Equine Welfare and Ethics Advisory Group,
- Review and monitor the implementation of this Policy and associated procedures on an annual basis,
- Ensure that all data collected by the BEF is kept in accordance with Data Protection requirements.

REPORTING CONCERNS

All Participants have an obligation to report concerns of abuse or mistreatment to their Member Body, the BEF, or statutory authorities. If the incident is witnessed during or in direct connection with an event, it should be reported to an Official at that event.

If the incident takes place at any other time, report the matter by:

1. Contacting the BEF through report@bef.co.uk

2. Contacting the relevant Member Body

If you think a horse needs urgent attention please contact the RSPCA, Police, or a local veterinary practice without delay.

During office hours, the following support lines are available:

- In England and Wales, contact the RSPCA
Telephone: 0300 1234 999
- In Scotland contact the Scottish SPCA
Telephone: 03000 999 999
- In Northern Ireland contact the USPCA
Telephone: 028 3025 1000
- The British Horse Society
Telephone: 02476 0517
Email: welfare@bhs.org.uk
- World Horse Welfare
Telephone: 0300 333 6000
Online reporting form: www.worldhorsewelfare.org/report
- The Donkey Sanctuary
Telephone: 01395 578 222



THE CHARTER FOR THE HORSE

As responsible members of the equestrian community, we pledge to this charter for the ethical and fair treatment of all horses and other equids under our care.

- Empathy:** Recognising horses are intelligent and emotional beings, we always prioritise their mental and physical health and overall wellbeing.
- Care:** Throughout their entire life, during exercise and rest, we offer horses a secure and suitable setting to create positive experiences that address their social, behavioural, nutritional and physical needs for a high quality of life.
- Respect:** Through compassionate, mindful, patient and empathetic interaction, we foster positive relationships with horses based on trust and respect.
- Consideration:** Each horse is an individual, and we strive to understand and meet their specific needs, including how they learn. We don't push horses beyond their health, fitness or ability levels, and we never let competitive or commercial influences compromise their welfare.
- Ethics:** In all our equine interactions, whether for leisure, training or sport, we adhere to the highest standards of equine welfare, safety, equipment, veterinary care and biosecurity, always guided by ethical principles.
- Learning:** Through continuously improving our equine knowledge, we evolve our behaviours based on education and informed advice from qualified professionals and the broader equestrian community.

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Jamie Gibson
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James Knott
CHAIR
Mounted Games
Association of GB

Jane Nixon
CHAIR
British Horse Foundation

Liz Inman
CHAIR
The Showing Council

Lucy Barclay-Carr
CEO
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THE PRINCIPLES OF EQUINE ETHICS AND WELFARE

- 1) The welfare of the horse shall not be subordinated to commercial or competitive influences. It is of paramount importance.
- 2) Whether on a permanent or temporary basis, all those who interact with horses have a legal duty of care for all animals they are responsible for.
- 3) Ensuring the safety and wellbeing of equines is everyone's responsibility. Appropriate action should be taken to ensure their needs are met, and any concerns must be reported.
- 4) The BEF and its Member Bodies are committed to ensuring equine behavioural, mental, social and physical needs (including thermal) are a key consideration in their activities.
- 5) The BEF and its Member Bodies work collaboratively to ensure that all reports of equine mistreatment are responded to appropriately and promptly, in line with case management practices.
- 6) Member Bodies will adopt a transparent and evidence-informed approach for assessing the welfare impact of equine equipment in training and competition.
- 7) The BEF and Member Bodies will embed a culture of using ethical, evidence-informed practices in equine training, management and performance.

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR THE WELFARE OF THE HORSE

This code of conduct provides the minimum standards that must be adhered to by those interacting with horses under the authority of the BEF and its Member Bodies. It builds on the 2006 Acts using the five (5) domains model and the three (3) essential needs model.

Behaviour which is found to be in breach of these provisions may incur sanctions from the British Equestrian Federation or the Fédération Equestre Internationale.

The basic needs of horses

Horses should be provided with a life that meets the five domains of animal welfare, and is centred on the three essential needs for equines; friends, forage, and freedom.

○ FRIENDS

Horses are highly social prey animals and, as such, socialisation with other horses is a vital part of their day-to-day life.

○ FORAGE

Horses are predominantly grazers and should be fed a forage-based diet. Forage can include grass, hay and haylage as well as chaffs and grass replacers.

○ FREEDOM

Freedom of movement is important for horses' physical and mental well-being. Herd turnout in varied terrain is the best option, but any turnout will be beneficial, as will loose schooling.

The 5 domains model considers; nutrition, environment, health, behaviour, and mental state.



Nutrition, environment and health are linked to internal pressures associated with survival, whereas behaviour can be influenced by external factors including the environment, other animals, and humans. More information on the three essential needs and five domains model is available via: [World Horse Welfare Resources](#).

MEETING THE NEEDS IN PRACTICE

Ensuring these needs are met has an impact on our day-to-day interactions with horses. Those under the authority of the BEF and its Member Bodies must ensure that;

ENVIRONMENT AND NUTRITION

Horses are kept in an environment appropriate for their needs, including;

- The option to move freely
- The option to socialise
- Protection from extremes of weather
- Quality nutrition and water must be made available, including
 - Foraging opportunities

HANDLING OF HORSES

- Horses are handled, trained, and competed in a manner that;
 - Is evidence-based
 - Is appropriate for their physical capabilities and maturity
 - Does not cause fear or pain
 - Does not constitute abuse

- Horses are protected from aggressive action or pressure, whether being handled or ridden.
- Qualified professionals are utilised to maintain high standards of;
 - Hoof health (farriers)
 - General health (vets)
- Equipment utilised when interacting with horses is appropriate and does not cause pain or risk of injury. For example, using properly fitted tack.
- Horses will not be subjected to misuse of aids (including through the use of equipment such as spurs or whips).

TRANSPORTATION AND COMPETITION

- Horses are transported safely in line with their needs, including;
 - Careful planning of journeys.
 - Regular rest opportunities where required, with access to food and water
 - Consideration of any extremes of weather.
 - Consideration of the fitness of individual horses and their suitability for travel.
 - Protection against injuries and risk of harm.
 - Consideration of vehicle suitability, ensuring that it is well-ventilated, disinfected as required, and appropriately maintained.
 - All vehicles should be driven by competent, appropriately qualified personnel.
 - Competent handlers being available.
- Horses shall not be left in vehicles in conditions that are detrimental to their wellbeing.
- The environment used in which to handle, train, or compete a horse is appropriate to meet the horse's needs, including;
 - Any ground surfaces are appropriately maintained to reduce the risk of injury.
 - Any obstacles are designed with equine safety in mind.
 - Competition conditions are designed with equine safety as a priority.
- At competition venues;
 - Water must be available at all times.
 - Any stables must be safe, hygienic, comfortable, well-ventilated and of sufficient size for the type and disposition of the horse.
 - Appropriate washing-down areas must be available.
- Horses are trained and competed only in line with the physical capabilities, maturity and fitness.

- Horses are handled, ridden, and competed by individuals competent for the task required.
- Horses have appropriate rest periods after travel, training, or competition.

VETERINARY CONSIDERATIONS

- Veterinary expertise is available at an event, and in the case of an injury or illness, horses receive prompt and appropriate treatment.
- There is strict adherence to all vaccination, microchipping, biosecurity, and anti-doping regulations.
- Where a concern is raised about a horse's fitness to compete, veterinary advice is taken prior to the horse being permitted to begin competition or continue to compete. In the event that the vet does not deem it suitable for the horse to compete, it shall not compete.
- Where the transportation of an injured horse is required at a competition, full supportive treatment should be administered prior to transportation. An equine ambulance should transport the horse to the nearest appropriate treatment centre for additional treatment.
- Following any veterinary treatment or injury, full recovery must be achieved before a horse competes.
- If injuries are sufficiently severe a Horse may need to be euthanised on humane grounds by a veterinarian, with the sole aim of minimising suffering.
- A zero-tolerance approach is taken to the illicit use of any medications or doping of horses.
- Mares must not compete after their fourth month of pregnancy or with a foal at foot.
- Horses must be treated in line with their needs when retiring from competition.

The Code of Conduct applies the five domains and three essential needs to real-world activities involving horses, providing standards that apply across equine activities. At all times, participants are bound by the rules and regulations of their individual Member Bodies.