

Control Sheet

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Equine Welfare Policy

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1.0 Position Statement

- Equines play an essential role in delivering RDA's life changing impact for disabled people. The welfare and wellbeing of our equines is paramount to participants, volunteers and all of us at RDA. We are committed to the highest standards of welfare and care in the treatment of equines within all RDA activities and ensuring that the equines we work with are always treated with compassion, kindness and respect. We expect all members to ensure a good life for horses (FEI, 2023), adopting the highest standards of positive welfare, using evidence informed practice.
- As responsible members of the equestrian community, alongside [British Equestrian](#), fellow member bodies and associated industry leaders, RDA has pledged to the Charter for the Horse – a unified approach for the ethical and fair treatment of all equines under our care. Under the six headings of empathy, care, respect, consideration, ethics and learning, the Charter (see below) outlines the actions we observe to ensure that the individual mental, physical and behavioural needs of all our equines are met.



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.

 <p><b style="color: #c00000;">Empathy</p> <p>Recognising horses are intelligent and emotional beings, we always prioritise their mental and physical health and overall wellbeing.</p>	 <p><b style="color: #c00000;">Care</p> <p>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.</p>	 <p><b style="color: #c00000;">Respect</p> <p>Through compassionate, mindful, patient and empathetic interaction, we foster positive relationships with horses based on trust and respect.</p>
 <p><b style="color: #c00000;">Consideration</p> <p>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.</p>	 <p><b style="color: #c00000;">Ethics</p> <p>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.</p>	 <p><b style="color: #c00000;">Learning</p> <p>Through continuously improving our equine knowledge, we evolve our behaviours based on education and informed advice from qualified professionals and the broader equestrian community.</p>

2.0 Our Equine Welfare Approach

Throughout RDA we adhere to the following principles in our approach to equine welfare. These principles apply to all RDA Groups and Accessibility Mark Centres. Where the term equine is used we are referring to (horses, ponies, donkeys, mules, equids).

RDA Groups work with equines in lots of different ways, some Groups own or loan their horses, whereas others might loan them for sessions in a commercial centre. This policy is designed to apply to all settings, but the application of specific items will need to be determined based on the level of control an RDA Group has over the equines used in RDA activities.

2.1 We prioritise equine welfare

- 2.1.1 We recognise that the equine is an intelligent and sentient being (Animal Welfare Sentience Act 2022) and will be sensitive to all physical, emotional, and social interactions.
- 2.1.2. The welfare of equines is of paramount importance to RDA, and must be held in the forefront of our minds at all times. Everyone involved in RDA has a duty to adhere to The Charter of the Horse and ensure a positive horse-human interaction. The welfare of the equine must come above commercial and competitive influences.
- 2.1.3 RDA has a responsibility to care for equines, before, during and after their working career, promoting a good life for horses (FEI, 2023).

2.2 We are continually learning and evolving to improve equine welfare

- 2.2.1 Equine welfare involves common sense and evidence informed practice RDA expects continual learning for all those involved in our activities in order to ensure the welfare of equines involved in our activities. RDA resources on the selection, training, welfare, and use of equines in RDA are for guidance in setting standards across RDA activity (to note, they are not intended to take the place of professional advice).
- 2.2.2 Practice will evolve as more research is conducted, but as a foundation follow the Charter Of The Horse.
- 2.2.3 Due to the unique nature of RDA activities, this policy further outlines the commitment to equine welfare. This should be read in conjunction with the following documents:
 - Annual Health Check and vaccination guidelines and Pre-purchase examination

2.3 We are all accountable for equine welfare

- 2.3.1 By participating in RDA activity, volunteers and paid employees agree to abide the Charter of the Horse and RDA Equine Welfare Policy at all times, regardless of their individual role.
- 2.3.2 RDA Coaches and Group Trustees are responsible for equine welfare in their sessions and Group activities. Welfare breaches are never acceptable, whether they are deliberate or through a lack of awareness.
- 2.3.3 RDA expects reporting of issues relating to equine welfare, both within Groups / Accessibility Mark Centres and to RDA UK (the national charity).

3.0 Equine Welfare throughout RDA activities

This section sets out our approach to equine welfare throughout the various stages of engagement with our equines, covering their selection for RDA use through to competition rules. RDA Groups and Accessibility Mark Centres (AMC) should attain all of the standards set out here and **must** comply with statements indicated as such. However, some of the points below may not be relevant to all RDA Groups and AMCs due to owned versus loaned equine and access to facilities.

Throughout all stages of preparation, training and the ultimate goal of competing (for some), welfare considerations **must** be paramount.

Selecting Equines for RDA use	
1	Equines must not be used for any RDA activity until they have been fully assessed (Assessment-Criteria-Equine-Assessment-Coach-Certificate-Level-Rev-22.docx). In the first instance by County Coach, Regional Coach, Regional Equine Advisor, Carriage Driving Assessor, if in the event of these volunteers being unavailable: by someone who has the necessary qualifications and experience to complete this assessment (BHS stage 3 and above, UKCC Level 2 and above). The assessment can also involve the Regional Vet if required (if there are any concerns or doubts).
2	Equines must be sound, in appropriate body condition (Horse Weight: Horse Body Condition Score The British Horse Society) and should not display any signs of stress during their introduction to RDA work. Veterinary or professional advice must be sought where there is any doubt.
3	Equines must be a minimum of 5 years old before they can be used in a session, 7 years for vaulting.
4	There is no maximum age limit for RDA equines however, the fitness, body condition, age, height and the presence of any medical or orthopaedic conditions should be taken into consideration when allocating work and carrying weights to older equines.
5	Stallions must not be used under any circumstances.
6	A stage 2 vetting must be carried out before the equine is used in RDA activity in the case of loaning or purchasing horses, ideally before the transaction is complete.

To promote a good life for equines it is imperative equine management is based on the Five Domains of Animal Welfare (nutrition, environment, health, behavioural interactions, and mental state / equine experiences) [five domains model](#) (Mellor *et al.*, 2020) and the Three F's (friends, forage and freedom) [The 3Fs - Friends, forage and freedom - World Horse Welfare](#). The following points (if appropriate for your group / centre) should be taken into consideration as they will assist in implementing the Charter for the Horse and the 3F's.

General Welfare and Care at Home	
1	A provision of suitable stabling or shelter and / or extended access to turnout or exercise daily must be provided, as well as socialisation with other equines (where available and appropriate).
2	Equines must be fed the correct amounts of good quality forage daily, with adequate supplies of water. Seek advice from a feeding company or nutritionist as and when necessary.
3	The grasslands and turnout areas must be appropriately managed (fencing, access to water, space, checked for poisonous plants).
4	Each equine must be treated as an individual and have a bespoke training plan that is appropriate to the type, physical and mental capacity, training level and experience, and the future aims of the equine. The duration and frequency of these sessions should be suitable for the equine involved and they are regularly monitored.
5	The exercise/workload is guided by the Group coach/coaches and should be suitable and appropriate for the individual equine and not compromise welfare.
6	Farriery, foot care, and shoeing must be of the correct and appropriate standard. Using a qualified farrier who is on the Farriers Registration Council (FRC) register (Find a Farrier - Farriers Registration Council).
7	Under the Veterinary surgeons Act (1965) only veterinary surgeons can make a diagnosis. In an unwell or injured equine, any diagnosis must be made by a veterinary surgeon. A veterinary surgeon should be consulted for any other treatment aside from maintenance provided by a musculoskeletal therapist. All attending professionals (physiotherapist, chiropractor) must be qualified and preferably on the Register Animal Musculoskeletal Practitioners (RAMP) register, (Search our Register RAMP , Find a Physio ACPAT) and should only be used with the permission of and in collaboration with a veterinary surgeon (unless a maintenance treatment).
8	Equines should have their teeth checked at least annually or as directed by a veterinary surgeon or a qualified equine dental technician (British Association of Equine Dental Technicians (BAEDT)) (British Association of Equine Dental Technicians - MEMBERS).
9	Any practices that could cause physical or emotional suffering or distress to the equine must be stopped immediately and the practice reviewed.

10	All equines owned by or under a long-term loan agreement with RDA Groups must have a minimum of a two stage pre purchase examination before starting in any RDA sessions. Ideally isolated before integration with herd.
11	Any equines (owned, long term loan, commercial, privately owned) should have an annual health check to ensure to ensure continued fitness for purpose. A coach, advanced coach, county coach, regional coach or regional equine advisor could carry out this annual health check. A Veterinary Surgeon can also be involved if there are any concerns.
12	Any medication used should be stored, labelled and administered correctly, with relevant PPE worn as detailed in the data sheet. This is to ensure it is correctly administered to the equine, but also to ensure the safety of RDA volunteers and participants.
13	The yard should have clear biosecurity measures in place. Further information can be found on the BHS website.

Public Perception	
1	Please ensure that you are always conducting yourselves appropriately, in line with this policy, at both events and at home when working with and around equines.
2	Seek to demonstrate best practice in the content you are distributing (such as on social media).

Care during RDA activity	
1	Equines showing symptoms of disease, lameness or other significant ailments or pre-existing clinical conditions must not be allowed to continue to be worked or compete when to do so would compromise their welfare. Veterinary advice must be sought whenever there is any doubt.
2	The choice of equine must be guided by the capacity of the equine, needs of the participant, and the skills of the coach.
3	Anyone working with the equine should be made aware of species specific and individual behavioural tendencies and advised of general health and safety guidelines in relation to interactions with the equine. Please see the Charter of the Horse Webinar Series, or contact equine@rda.org.uk if you require additional support and / or guidance.
4	Equines must be familiar with the tasks included in the session or if new tasks/equipment are used that these are introduced with care.

5	All tack and equipment should be cleaned regularly and kept soft and pliable to prevent injury through rubbing. Tack and equipment should be professionally (Members - The Society of Master Saddlers) and correctly fitted and used as intended by design, in accordance with the manufacturer's guidelines, as poorly fitted, over tightened, or inappropriate tack can cause pain, injury, and discomfort to the equine. The frequency of professional tack fitting should be determined in consultation with the professional concerned.
6	The environment in which the sessions are conducted should be safe and secure for both participants and equines (adequate size, configuration, proximity to other facilities).
7	The ground surface of the session should provide safe footing for all.
8	Resources (any equipment used in RDA sessions) should be regularly checked for safety / wear and tear.
9	Horse/ rider / driver combination of the equine must be implemented and reviewed to ensure all are suitably matched. Please see Horse-and-Rider-Combination-Assessment-Form-July-2024.docx and Weight-Chart-Guidelines-2018-1.pdf for riding and Carriage-Driving-Weight-Chart-August-2024.xlsx for carriage driving .
10	Before undertaking ridden or driven activity the equines should be warmed up and cooled down sufficiently as it is critical to the equine's well-being. The intensity of exercise should be decreased following exertion / RDA activity allowing the equine to relax mentally, and for heart rate and respiration to return to normal.
11	The equine should be fit enough for the activity they are doing, and if you are in any doubt stop the activity, remove the equine and reassess.
12	The equine must be appropriately trained to carry out the required activities. The equines current physical and mental stage of maturity must be taken into consideration when planning their RDA activity .
13	Activities outside of RDA sessions which equines are involved in also should be considered, as well as potential positive or negative impact that these may have on equine quality of life.
14	Periods of alternative activities / rest periods should be provided to ensure that the welfare of equines involved in RDA sessions is not compromised.

Please see the rule book for Group and Competition rules and the approved tack and equipment guide for further advice and guidance

Long-term equine care	
1	We are all committed to the highest standards of welfare and care in the treatment of equine when they need to be retired from RDA activities to ensure that the equines are always treated with compassion, kindness and respect.
2	Each equine is unique, and decisions on the retirement of equines must be based on quality of life evaluation and take into account the veterinary guidance, any owners involvement and the individual groups circumstances (their ability to meet the individual mental, physical and behavioural needs of the equine, or to find suitable alternative care).
3	Within this decision making, primacy must be given to the veterinary guidance.
4	If veterinary guidance states the equine needs to be euthanised for whatever reason. These guidelines must be adhered to.

For further advice and guidance please also see [Friends at the End | The British Horse Society \(bhs.org.uk\)](https://www.bhs.org.uk)

4.0 Reporting Equine Welfare Concerns

- RDA expects reporting of concerns relating to equine welfare as part of our commitment to the highest standards of welfare and care in the treatment of equines within all RDA activities. It is everyone's responsibility and duty to report and investigate poor practices that could impact the welfare of an equine.
- Should the approaches set out in this policy not be met, especially where this is marked as an essential requirement of RDA Groups or Accessibility Mark Centres, then RDA expects reporting within the RDA Group concerned, and where appropriate to RDA UK.
- The failure of RDA Groups to meet the essential requirements of this welfare policy is unacceptable.
- RDA Groups are required to keep records of any concerns raised. The communication and reporting procedures are documented in the attached flowchart.

4.1 Examples of Welfare Concerns

The following examples are considered abuse of the equine:

- Over-working – to use an excessively tired, lame, or injured equine.
- Lameness – using an unsound or unlevel equine.
- Distress (including mental or physical) – equine must not be allowed to suffer any form of distress (or fail to alleviate distress) whether caused by the rider or avoidable external factors.
- Misuse of aids – abuse of an equine using natural riding aids or artificial aids.
- Aggression – any form of aggressive or forceful action during RDA activity or handling.
- Force – exerting unnecessary or excessive pressure on the equine, including inappropriate or disproportionate corrections.

Follow the flow chart for reporting welfare concerns, **before** reporting to RDA UK. If flow chart has been followed and the concern has not been resolved. Follow the guidelines below to enable us to investigate fully and refer to our equine welfare advisory board, as deemed appropriate by the CEO of RDA. This may be in the form of advice, guidance, and support for the RDA group, including any further training and education, or potential disciplinary action.

- We are unable to respond to welfare concerns reported to us through social media.
- If you have already reported your concerns to another welfare organisation and they have confirmed that they will be investigating, please do not contact other organisations or charities.
- Please only contact us if you have personally seen an equine (s) of concern. Unfortunately, we cannot take calls/emails about second-hand information, including content seen on social media.

- Throughout the UK, equines are managed and kept in many different ways. Sometimes we may not agree with the way in which an equine is kept but if their needs are being met and the equine is not suffering, then we are unlikely to be able to take any action.
- A member of the public should contact the RDA Group / Accessibility Mark Centre in the first instance.

5.0 Reporting Information Requirements

When you are reporting a potential equine welfare concern, please include the following details to help us assess the situation, the more information you can give us the better. Email to equine@rda.org.uk.

- RDA Group / Accessibility Mark centre
- Location / Date / Time
- Equine Name / age / colour (if known) / activity (ground work/ridden etc)
- Name of coach / person in charge of the activity (if known)
- Who this concern has been raised with, and any action taken
- Details of why you are concerned (photographs can also be included as long as they have been taken safely and any consent of participants / volunteers have been approved)
- Your contact details in case we require more information or further clarification
- Anonymous reporting of concerns can be made to equine@rda.org.uk, with as much information as possible required to assist any investigation.

6.0 Further reading

- Equine Gift and Loan guidelines (link to follow)
- Riding School guidelines [Hiring out horses licensing: statutory guidance for local authorities - GOV.UK](#)