



NEWWC

**NATIONAL EQUINE
WELFARE COUNCIL**

NEWWC Standards Guidance

For Members and Associates

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1. INTRODUCTION

This Standards Guidance, produced by the National Equine Welfare Council (NEWC), aims to ensure the maintenance of high welfare standards and to promote a good quality of life for all equines. Quality of life is dependent upon the extent to which their behavioural needs for space, company and forage are fulfilled (the three Fs of Freedom, Friends and Forage initially identified in [the horse's manifesto](#), and the balance between positive (pleasant) and negative (unpleasant) lifetime experiences. A good life for equines can be defined as one where their species-specific needs are met and their lifetime experiences, particularly in relation to their interactions with humans, are predominantly positive. This guidance aims to promote evidence-based approaches to equine care, to support NEWC members and associates, and the wider equine community in achieving a good life for all equines.

All NEWC members and associates must adhere to the NEWC's General Standards, regardless of whether they keep equines. These standards have been developed to ensure that all members and associates of NEWC work to advocate, protect, and improve equine welfare in whatever activities they are involved in. In addition, and as a means of promoting best practice, standards for keeping equines are included and must be adhered to by all equine keeping NEWC members and associates. These standards include legal requirements, reference to necessary policies and procedures, as well as those relating to horse care, management, and training. For equine-keeping organisations, an initial accreditation visit is conducted to assess adherence to the NEWC standards. All NEWC members and associates are required to identify how they align with the general NEWC standards, commit to attaining and upholding these standards, and undergo a re-accreditation process at regular intervals (currently every two years). Such re-accreditations may be accomplished via an on-site visit by a director or their representative, peer review, or self-reaccreditation.

All NEWC members and associates are expected to reflect on their own practices and adapt these as necessary to ensure the advancement of high standards of equine welfare across the equine sector. In addition, there is the expectation that members and associates will keep up to date with significant developments in research and understanding.

2. MEMBERS AND ASSOCIATES OF NEWC

Joining the National Equine Welfare Council (NEWC) is a powerful way for individuals and organisations to demonstrate their commitment to raising equine welfare standards across the UK. By becoming part of the NEWC, you will join a network dedicated to promoting best practices, improving education and awareness, and ensuring that the welfare of horses, ponies, and donkeys remains at the forefront of the equine industry.

2.1 Benefits of joining NEWC

Becoming a member or associate of NEWC is about demonstrating your commitment to the health, safety, and well-being of equines and taking a proactive role in raising welfare standards nationwide. By adding your voice to NEWC, you help ensure that equine welfare remains a priority in all industry decisions.

Joining NEWC provides a seal of credibility and commitment, signalling to both the public and the equine industry that your organisation's primary focus is the welfare of equines. Being a NEWC member or associate aligns you with the mission to protect and improve the lives of equines and also actively involves you in initiatives that shape the future of equine welfare standards.

Further benefits to joining NEWC can be found on [our website](#).

2.2 Criteria for NEWC member or associate status

2.2.1 Member of NEWC

Organisations that fulfil the following criteria are welcome to apply for Membership:

Registered charities, Community Interest Companies (CICs), or formally constituted Further Education (FE) or Higher Education (HE) establishments based in the UK that either:

- actively involved in keeping equines in the UK, **or**
- have equine welfare as a principal objective, **and**
- who have undergone a thorough assessment process.

Organisations that are actively involved in the keeping of equines must have their main* premises located in the UK, have undergone an initial accreditation visit followed by either bi-annual self-accreditation or assessor-led accreditations and meet the NEWC Standards for keeping equines. All members must actively uphold the NEWC general standards.

*Definition of main - the principal location where an organisation carries out its core equine-related activities, including but not limited to the housing, care, management, training, or rehabilitation of equines. This location serves as the organisation's central base of operations in relation to equine welfare and must be situated within the United Kingdom.

2.2.2 Associate of NEWC

Open to individuals and organisations that do not fulfil the status of a registered charity or CIC in the UK* but have a primary focus on equine welfare and either -

- actively keep equines in the UK, **or**
- have equine welfare as a principal objective, **and**
- who have undergone a thorough assessment process and comply with the Regulations for associates.

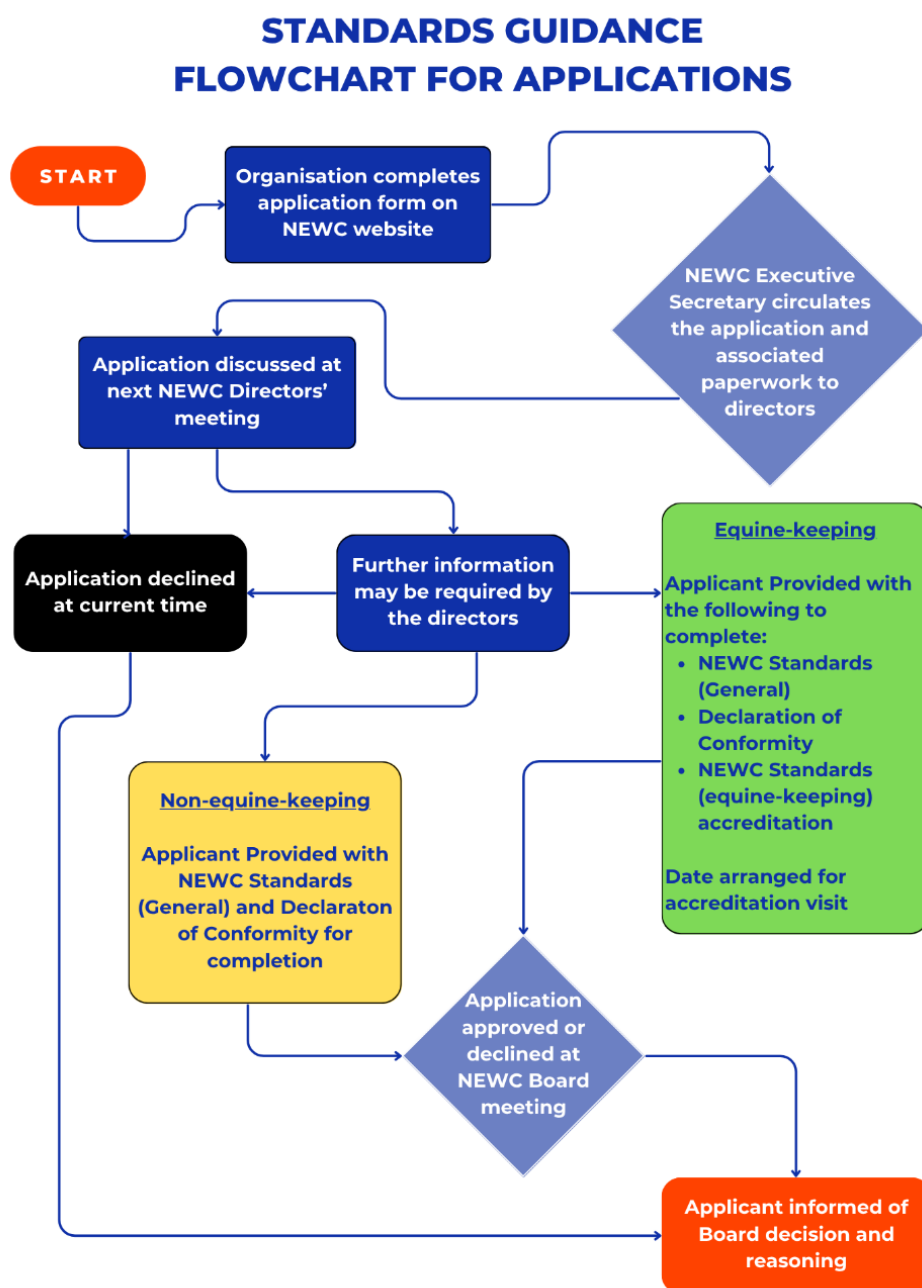
*Organisations that are actively involved in the keeping of equines must have their main premises located in the UK, have undergone an initial accreditation visit followed by either bi-annual self-accreditation or assessor-led accreditations and meet the NEWC Standards for keeping equines. All associates must actively uphold the NEWC general standards.

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2.3 Application process

Becoming a member or associate of NEWC is subject to evidencing compliance with the NEWC Standards, a successful initial accreditation (for applications from equine-keeping organisations) and approval by the NEWC Board of Directors.

A Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) is in place for the processing of new applications, which can be found here [\[link to follow\]](#). The flow chart below explains the steps to becoming a member or associate of NEWC.



2.3.1 Initial Accreditation

The NEWC accreditation system will enable all members and associates to undergo a thorough and equal process of accreditation, the purpose of which is to be supportive and developmental, where appropriate.

All members and associates will undergo accreditation and sign a document of conformity, although only equine keeping organisations will require an on-site assessment.

New equine-keeping applications will undergo an initial accreditation visit following receipt of an initial self-accreditation. Full details of the accreditation process can be found on the NEWC Standard Operating Procedure [here](#) [link to follow].

2.3.2 Declined applications

Applications may be declined if an organisation fails to engage fully with the process for applications or is found not to be reaching a satisfactory level of compliance with the NEWC standards. Full details of the application process can be found in NEWC's standard operating procedure [here](#) [link to follow].

2.3.3 Annual Fees

An annual fee is payable to NEWC by both members and associates. New members or associates will have their first year's fee charged on a pro-rata basis, calculated from the Board meeting at which they are accepted to NEWC.

Member and associate fees are on a sliding scale based on your income as submitted to the Charities Commission or Companies House and/or declared, and whether the organisation is actively involved in keeping equines. Where charities are multi-species, the annual income for that charity will be divided by the number of species actively kept (up to a maximum of 4) and the fee relevant to that figure applied.

The NEWC reviews fees annually. Further information on the fees is available [here](#) [link to follow]. N.B. There may be an additional application fee to cover a percentage of the costs of the initial accreditation visit.

The current annual fee structure is shown below.

Band	Annual Income	Equine Keeping	Non-Equine Keeping
A	More than £10m	£2,000	£500
B	£5m - £10m	£1,500	£450
C	£2m - £5m	£750	£350
D	£1m - £2m	£500	£250
E	£500k-£1m	£350	£200
F	£100k- £500k	£250	£175
G	£25k- £100k	£200	£150
H	less than £25k	£175	£125
I	HEI's	£225	

2.3.4 Ongoing requirement to maintain NEWC Standards

All members and associates, both equine-keeping and non-equine-keeping, will be required to maintain the standards required by NEWC. They will be required to complete self-re-accreditation every two years, including the statement of conformity.

Equine keeping members and associates will be re-accredited via a self-assessment every other year and/or an onsite visit. Particular focus on an on-site visit will be on supporting any areas of non-compliance noted on the self-accreditation. The NEWC Standards (General), statement of conformity and self-re-accreditation form will be sent via email and will include any actions from the previous assessments. The forms should be returned within one month to the NEWC office, where they will be assessed by a NEWC Director, and a summary of any recommendations or actions required will be sent back to the member or associate within one month with the opportunity for further discussion/support.

2.4 Termination of Member/Associate status

Member/associate status may be terminated for the following reasons -

- Unpaid NEWC annual fees, or
- Failing to comply with the process of self-re-accreditation or,
- Not meeting an acceptable level of compliance with the NEWC Standards

Full details of the process for terminating member or associate status can be found in NEWC's standard operating procedure here [\[link to follow\]](#).

2.5 Complaints against a NEWC Member or Associate

NEWC will fully investigate complaints from members of the public or organisations relating to NEWC members or associates. In the first instance, the complaint should be referred to the NEWC office. The NEWC has a complaints procedure that will be followed, details of which can be found here [\[link to follow\]](#).

3. NEWC STANDARDS (GENERAL)

All NEWC members and associates are required to actively uphold and promote the principles of adherence to legal requirements and practices that advance equine welfare standards. All NEWC members and associates are expected to:

- Promote and advance equine management that fulfils the species-specific needs for space, company, and forage (the three Fs of Freedom, Friends, and Forage).
- Ensure that equine interactions with people are predominantly positive (pleasant) experiences and avoid or adapt procedures, interactions and activities that are likely to be negative (unpleasant) experiences.
- Raise awareness of equine welfare issues and help to improve equine welfare standards nationwide.
- Encourage and assist equestrian and equine-related organisations/stakeholders to achieve and maintain the NEWC Standards for Keeping Equines.
- Promote a responsible approach to breeding equines, to include management practices that address species-specific needs (notably in relation to social grouping and weaning). (See also Health Section).
- Ensure that any information produced/disseminated (including website/marketing / educational materials) reflects the NEWC Standards and does not include anything that may be perceived as compromising equine welfare.

All NEWC members and associates are encouraged to adopt a sustainable approach to both equine management and other organisational activities*.

* Practices that serve to reduce the carbon footprint, enhance biodiversity, help with water management, and increase nature connectivity should be promoted. NEWC members and associates have contributed to the development of the Equine Carbon Calculator, which is free to use and can be accessed via this link: calculator.farmcarbontoolkit.org.uk/equine

All members and associates are invited to share their experiences of using this and other approaches to facilitate the development of best practice in this area.

All NEWC members and associates are required to work towards a better Quality of Life for equines, to provide them all with a good life from birth onwards, and to include a humane end.

Note that attendance by a representative of the organisation at the NEWC Annual General Meeting (AGM) and General Meeting (GM) is a key expectation of all members and associates.

3.1 Declarations of conformity with NEWC Standards (General)

All NEWC members and associates are required to declare how they conform to the NEWC General Standards, initially when applying to join NEWC (as part of the accreditation process), and subsequently every two years for re-accreditation. During the process of re-accreditation, members and associates should refer to their progress over the past two years. Responses to the following questions about the organisation concerned are required:

- Identification of how your organisation will contribute to NEWC and the advancement of equine welfare (new applications) OR demonstrate/provide evidence of your engagement with NEWC and how you have improved equine welfare over the past two years (re-accreditation).
- Current equine welfare challenges specific to your organisation, and what actions are being taken to address these.
- Evidence of how you encourage and assist your equestrian and equine-related organisations/stakeholders to achieve and maintain the NEWC Standards for Keeping Equines.
- How do you raise awareness of general equine welfare issues and help to improve equine welfare standards nationwide? Identify the areas you are focusing on, and how these are being promoted (please provide at least two examples).
- Examples of how you are adopting a sustainable approach within your organisation.
- Concerning your responses above, list at least three actions that you will prioritise over the next two years. Include reasons for your choices and details of how these will be achieved.

- Please list the NEWC meetings (including AGM and GM) attended by your organisation since your last accreditation.

4. GOVERNANCE AND LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES

All NEWC members and associates are required to comply with current legislation; they must be aware of their responsibilities and comply with existing, new or updated legislation relevant to their area of work.

4.1 Legal requirements

4.1.1 Charity Commission

NEWC members who are registered charities must comply with the requirements of the Charity Commission. Up-to-date guidance can be obtained by referring to the Charity Commission website: gov.uk/government/organisations/charity-commission. The charity Trustees must deliver only on the charity's purposes (objects) and regularly review the charity's purposes to ensure they properly reflect the charity's work, aims and objectives.

Particular attention should be given to risk management of the charity and how the charity will respond to the risks it may face - the uncertainty surrounding events and their outcomes that may have a significant impact, either enhancing or inhibiting any area of the charity's operations. Guidance on risk management can be found here - gov.uk/government/publications/charities-and-risk-management

4.1.2 Fundraising

Many NEWC members are reliant on fundraising. The Fundraising Regulator provides the Code of Fundraising Practice that sets the standards that apply to fundraising carried out by all charitable institutions and third-party fundraisers in the UK and must be followed by NEWC members. The Code of Fundraising can be found here - fundraisingregulator.org.uk/code

4.1.3 Insurance

NEWC members and associates are required to hold at a minimum, suitable Public Liability Insurance and Employers' Liability Insurance. Specialist advice should be sought from a

qualified insurance professional to ensure the most appropriate cover is obtained. The current certificates should be displayed appropriately.

4.1.4 General Data Protection Regulation

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) establishes strict guidelines for the collection, processing and storage of personal data within the UK. Key requirements include obtaining explicit consent from individuals before processing their data, ensuring transparency about how data is used, and providing individuals with rights to access, rectify, or erase their information. Data breaches must be reported to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) within 72 hours of the potential breach.

NEWC members and associates must implement appropriate security measures to protect personal data and appoint a Data Protection Officer (DPO) if necessary. They must have a GDPR policy, ensure that all personal data is stored compliantly and provide employees with GDPR training. Further information can be found on the Government website - gov.uk/data-protection-your-business.

4.1.5 Safeguarding

Safeguarding means protecting people's health, well-being and human rights, and enabling them to live free from harm, abuse and neglect. All NEWC members and associate organisations must have a safeguarding policy, and it should include provision for safeguarding children and young people (under 18) if applicable to the organisation. The policy should outline the importance of preventing abuse in any form and clear procedures for reporting safeguarding incidents.

4.2 Health and safety requirements

Employees, volunteers and visitors must be made aware of the organisation's health and safety policy. It is the responsibility of all parties to ensure a safe environment by adhering to health and safety procedures and safe working practices.

In addition to ensuring all work equipment is suitable, fit for purpose and well maintained, organisations must have in place safe systems of work and ensure that these are followed.

4.2.1 First Aid

Employee first aid provision is vital in ensuring a safe workplace and responding effectively to medical emergencies. There must be an appropriate number of suitably qualified first aiders, including mental health first aiders, for the organisation's employee numbers and activities. First aid kits must be well stocked, regularly checked and replenished. Records should be kept of the training provided to the organisation's first aiders, as review training will be required regularly. Details of the organisation's first aiders must be displayed along with clear signage of first aid locations. Further details on the provision of first aid in the workplace can be found on the Health and Safety Executive's website - [hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/firstaid](https://www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/firstaid).

4.2.2 Fire Safety

Fire risk assessments are a legal requirement that must be carried out and focus on the safety in case of fire of all relevant persons. The risk assessment should pay particular attention to those at enhanced risk, such as the disabled and must include consideration of any fire hazards and sources of ignition and fuel that may be on the premises, for many NEWC organisations this will include hay, straw, shavings, gas bottles, chemicals, furniture, fuel and hydraulic oil. This fire risk assessment must be reviewed regularly and updated as required.

All organisations must have an emergency fire evacuation plan; employees must be made aware of the plan, and regular fire drills must be carried out. There must be a clearly marked emergency assembly point, and 'in the event of a fire' notices must be displayed in all offices/buildings and at regular intervals around yards.

Records should be kept of the servicing of fire extinguishers and any other firefighting equipment. Fire drills should be documented.

Further reliable information can be found at [hse.gov.uk/fireandexplosion/fire-safety.htm](https://www.hse.gov.uk/fireandexplosion/fire-safety.htm) and [gov.uk/workplace-fire-safety-your-responsibilities](https://www.gov.uk/workplace-fire-safety-your-responsibilities).

4.2.3 Organisation Risk Assessments

In many workplaces, there are risks which may affect the health and safety of employees. A properly conducted risk assessment is an important step in protecting employees and the business, as well as complying with the law. In many instances, straightforward measures can

control risks, and whilst the law does not expect employers to eliminate all risks, they are required to protect people so far as is reasonably practicable.

Risk assessments must be in place for all the activities and areas of the member or associate organisation. All employees and volunteers must have access to the risk assessments and have signed to confirm they understand their responsibilities contained within them; they should also receive additional training if it is highlighted as a mitigation within a risk assessment.

Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) is a legal requirement to manage the risks associated with hazardous substances in the workplace. This includes chemicals, biological agents and other materials such as straw and shavings dust, that can cause harm to health. Under COSHH, employers must conduct a risk assessment to identify hazardous substances, evaluate their potential health effects and determine appropriate control measures to minimise exposure, for example, providing personal protective equipment (PPE) as well as ensuring proper storage and disposal of hazardous materials. Regular reviews and updates to the COSHH assessments are necessary to maintain a safe working environment. For many of our members or associates, this will include ensuring a system is in place for the disposal of medical and veterinary waste.

Further information can be found at hse.gov.uk/coshh/index.htm.

4.2.4 Health and Safety Policy

A health and safety policy outlines an organisation's commitment to ensuring the well-being of its employees, visitors, and stakeholders. It sets the framework for identifying, managing, and reducing health and safety risks in the workplace. The policy typically includes a statement of intent, detailing the organisation's objectives, responsibilities of management and employees, and the procedures for reporting and addressing health and safety concerns. It emphasises compliance with relevant legislation, regular risk assessments, employee training, and the importance of fostering a culture of safety. By clearly communicating these principles, the policy aims to promote a safe working environment and enhance overall organisational performance. Regular reviews and updates ensure the policy remains effective and relevant to changing circumstances.

The NEWC standards require all members and associates to have a written health and safety policy and to display a Health and Safety at Work Act poster with the required contact details completed.

4.2.5 Accident reporting

An accident is defined as an unplanned event that results in personal injury or damage to property, plant or equipment. A 'near miss' is any incident, accident or emergency which did not result in an injury. It is a requirement to have an accident reporting procedure and accident and 'near miss' book(s)/forms. The organisation must review the accidents and near misses, investigate the cause of the accident and review existing safety procedures if applicable. hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/accident-book.htm

4.2.6 RIDDOR – Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations

RIDDOR is the law that requires employers and other people in charge of work premises to report and keep records of all:

- Work-related fatalities
- Work-related injuries
- Diagnosed cases of reportable occupational diseases
- Certain dangerous occurrences (incidents with the potential to cause harm)

Accidents that must be reported under RIDDOR include, but are not limited to, fatalities arising from a work-related incident; fractures; amputations; permanent loss or reduction of sight; crush injuries leading to internal organ damage; serious burns; and head injuries causing unconsciousness. Further information on RIDDOR is available on the Health and Safety Executive website: hse.gov.uk/riddor.

4.2.7 OHS (Occupational Health and Safety) compliance records

OHS compliance records are essential documents that demonstrate an organisation's adherence to health and safety regulations and standards. These records typically include:

- **Risk Assessments:** Documentation of identified hazards, risk evaluations, and control measures implemented to mitigate risks.

- **Training Records:** Evidence of health and safety training provided to employees, including attendance.
- **Incident Reports:** Detailed accounts of accidents, injuries, and near misses, including investigations and corrective actions taken.
- **Inspection Reports:** Records of routine safety inspections and audits, noting compliance with safety standards and identifying areas for improvement.
- **Maintenance Logs:** Documentation of maintenance and servicing of equipment and safety systems, ensuring they remain in safe working order.
- **Policy and Procedure Documents:** Copies of the organisation's health and safety policies and procedures, including any updates or revisions.
- **Emergency Plans:** Records of emergency response plans, drills, and evaluations of the effectiveness of these plans.
- **Regulatory Correspondence:** Documentation of communications with health and safety regulatory bodies, including inspections and compliance evaluations.

Maintaining accurate and up-to-date OHS compliance records is crucial for demonstrating legal compliance, improving workplace safety, and facilitating effective audits or inspections.

4.3 HR requirements

At a minimum, UK law requires businesses to have the following HR policies in place:

- Disciplinary and dismissal
- Grievances
- Health and safety

To meet the NEWC standards, members and associates are expected to have a clear management/line reporting structure in place. All employees, trainees or work-based apprentices must have a job description and contract of employment. There should be an employee handbook available to all employees and a Diversity and Inclusion policy in place.

Training and development are crucial for enhancing skills, ensuring compliance with legal requirements and fostering a culture of continuous improvement within organisations. There

should be regular assessments and feedback mechanisms to help identify training needs and the continued personal development of employees.

4.4 Policies and procedures

While organisations will have many policies and procedures in place covering the areas in which they work, to meet the NEWC standards at a minimum, the following must be included within policies and procedures and be available as part of the accreditation of equine-keeping organisations:

- Admissions
- Disease Outbreak and Quarantine
- Equine handling/training/riding
- Euthanasia
- Isolation/Biosecurity
- Lone worker (to include the handling of equines alone)
- Non-breeding/castration
- Rider Weight
- Transport
- Vaccination
- Whistleblowing

There must be a review system for all policies and procedures held by the organisation, and this must be adhered to and evidenced through records. Employees must be able to access those policies and procedures relevant to their area of responsibility, and training on specific areas must be provided if required. The organisation must ensure that employees and volunteers are aware of the minimum standards required by the relevant national Codes of Practice for the Welfare of Equines. This includes the Defra Code of Practice for England, the Scottish Government's Code of Practice for the Welfare of Equidae, the Welsh Government's Code of Practice for the Welfare of Horses, and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) Code of Practice for the Welfare of Equines in Northern Ireland. An

up-to-date version of the appropriate Code(s) of Practice, along with these NEWC standards, must be available; these may be stored electronically.

4.5 Future-proofing requirements

Succession planning should form part of the risk management assessment of the charity, while it is advantageous to have a plan in writing for the purposes of the standards required by NEWC, succession planning must be regularly considered by the Trustees, and this can be evidenced by inclusion in the minutes of meetings.

Organisations should have a plan in place to secure the long-term care and meet the welfare needs of their residents throughout their lifetime.

To assist with planning future work and activities, there must be a written strategy or delivery plan focusing on the goals/objectives/strategy for the organisation.

While it is not currently a requirement for an organisation to have a sustainability and/or environmental plan in place, the impact of the charity's activities on the planet and the surrounding environment must be considered. This is particularly important when considering waste disposal and land management.

4.6 Equine identification regulations

The requirements of the current regulations on equine identification must be complied with. All equines within the ownership of NEWC members or associates must be identified with a microchip and an identification document (passport). Passports must be kept securely and available for inspection by an enforcement body or a person authorised by the NEWC Directors during an inspection or accreditation visit.

When equines are first brought into the care of the organisation, they are scanned for a microchip and cross-matched with their passport if it is present. Where passports are not provided with the equine, the organisation should –

- Where the equine has a microchip, make enquiries to see if a passport has been issued matching the chip and then work with the issuing PIO (Passport Issuing Organisation) to obtain a duplicate passport.
- Where the equine does not have a microchip, microchip at the earliest opportunity and apply for a passport within 30 days of arrival.

If the equine is being boarded on behalf of an enforcement organisation, follow the guidance given by the enforcement organisation.

Where ownership has passed to the member or associate organisation, confirmation of the transfer of ownership must be kept and the ownership details updated with the PIO within 30 days of arrival.

Where an equine dies or is euthanised, the passport must be returned to the PIO within 30 days.

Passports must accompany the equine on all transport journeys, and if the equine is moved to a foster or loan home. In these circumstances, where ownership has not changed, the member or associate organisation should keep a copy of the passport on file.

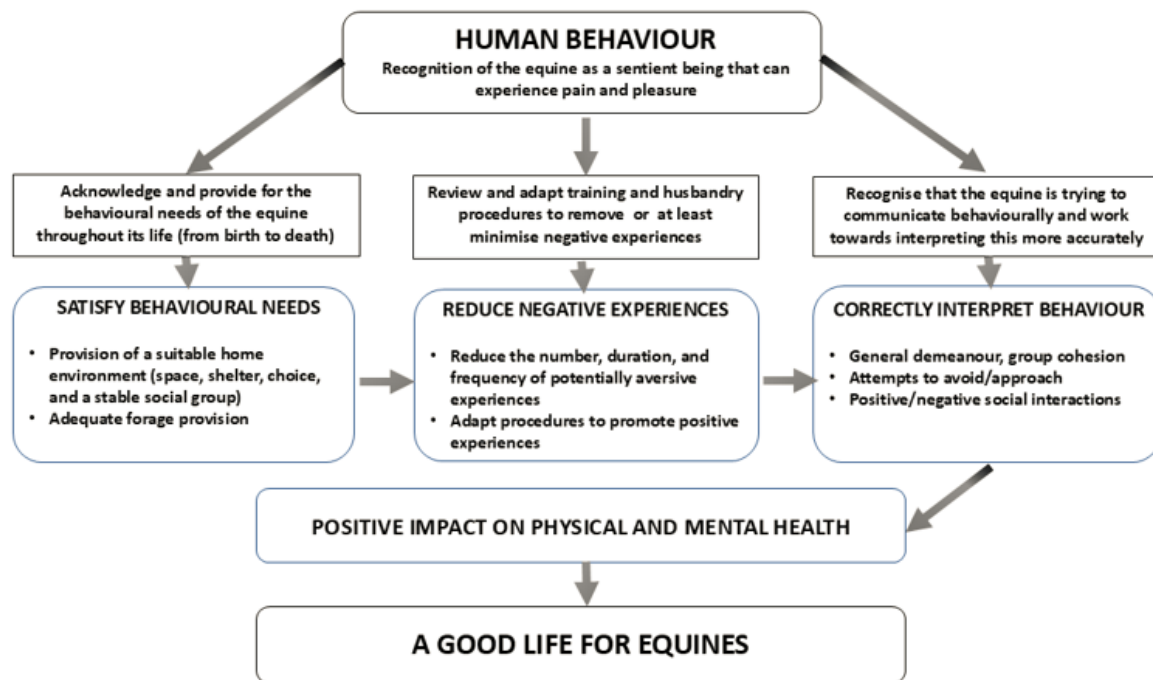
5. NEWC STANDARDS (EQUINE-KEEPING)

GUIDANCE FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NEWC STANDARDS FOR KEEPING EQUINES

As noted in the Introduction, NEWC aims to promote high welfare standards and a good quality of life for all equines. The NEWC standards for keeping equines were developed to achieve this aim, and this guidance provides information to facilitate the implementation of these standards when managing and interacting with equines in their diverse roles. ‘Equines’ refers collectively to horses, ponies, donkeys, and their hybrids.

The approaches used to assess the welfare of animals incorporate the impact of all aspects of life on their mental state, and the cumulative effect of lifelong positive and negative experiences. The multiple factors that contribute to the animal’s mental state (nutrition, physical environment, health and behavioural interactions with other equines, humans and the environment) are identified in the Five Domains Model developed by [Mellor *et al.* \(2020\)](#), and cumulative effect of positive and negative experiences over time included in the Animal Welfare Assessment Grid ([AWAG](#)). These principles are incorporated in the NEWC standards and guidelines, compiled to promote best practice and positive equine welfare. An emphasis on the importance of providing animals with opportunities to fulfil their natural behavioural needs (as included in the [guiding principles for humane livestock farming in the Netherlands](#)), underpins the potential for achieving a positive mental state.

This guidance is based on evidence from peer-reviewed scientific studies and practical application, aligning with the NEWC accreditation standards. The flow chart below illustrates how human behaviour can facilitate progression from providing for their behavioural needs to achieving a good life for all equines*.



*Adapted from [Hall and Kay 2024 \(Part II\)](#). See also [Hall and Kay 2024 \(Part I\)](#).

5.1 Environment

Equine wellbeing (quality of life) relies on an environment, both physical and social, that can meet their space, shelter, nutritional and ethological needs. There is evidence that equine welfare is compromised by restrictive, individual housing, and consequently, equines should be kept in appropriate groups in areas providing sufficient space to allow freedom of movement (outside of structured exercise) and provided with adequate forage. Access to the three Fs (friends, freedom and forage) is a requirement for all equines to enable them to fulfil their species-specific behavioural needs. It is acknowledged that temporary restrictions may be necessary for health reasons, food restriction to manage weight, the management of breeding stock (see also the section on breeding) or gradual adaptation from more restrictive systems. This would include equines who have previously been kept individually and consequently never developed equine social skills, resulting in problems in adapting to living with others.

5.1.1 Pasture management

The grazing system used should support equine welfare by meeting nutritional needs (with supplementary forage provided/ grazing restricted as required) and preventing overgrazing.

Best practices include:

- Rotating and resting pastures to prevent overgrazing and soil compaction.
- Providing supplementary forage when grass is insufficient, ensuring equal access to minimise conflict.
- Removing toxic plants regularly, referencing resources like Blue Cross and The Donkey Sanctuary for identification.
- Collecting manure daily to control parasites and avoid latrine roughs.
- Avoiding or carefully managing chemicals to prevent exposure.
- Preparing for seasonal changes, such as mitigating mud in winter and providing shade and fly control in summer.

Where supplementary forage is provided, this is presented in a way that allows access to all equines, minimises conflict and avoids poaching of adjacent areas. Individual turnout should be available if required (for example, for health, as above), with company provided in adjacent or nearby areas that equines can see, if not physically interact with, other equines. The area required will depend on several factors (including the size, type and condition of the equine, quality of the pasture, pasture management) but as an approximate guide the British Horse Society suggest one horse per 0.4-0.6 hectares on permanent grazing (1-1.5 acres per horse); The Donkey Sanctuary suggest a minimum of 0.5 acres per donkey.

Periods of adverse weather for a particular season are a challenge that gives further weight to the importance of good stewardship of the land and flora. Pasture must be managed effectively to mitigate poaching, erosion/bare soil and overgrazing, ideally rotated and rested where possible. It should be free from hazards (for example, insecure or old, loose, collapsed fencing, old machinery, litter and rubbish).

Many plants and trees in the UK are toxic to equines. Recognition and removal of these plants is an important part of pasture management. Although there is easily available information regarding the most common toxic plants and trees found in pasture (for example, [Sycamore trees](#) (*Acer pseudoplatanus*)), many other plants may have a deleterious impact on equine

health. Information and illustrations of common plants and trees to avoid can be found on NEWC member websites (for example, [Blue Cross](#)). More comprehensive information can be accessed from [The Donkey Sanctuary website](#), including downloadable fact sheets. The risk of animals ingesting toxic plants is increased when they are kept on bare pasture and have inadequate forage provision. However, some toxic plants are palatable to horses (and donkeys?) but potentially harmful, for example [Common Cat's Ear](#) (*Hypochaeris radicata*), which is associated with Stringhalt in horses. Other plants may cause health problems, for example, [Alsike clover](#) (*Trifolium hybridum*), which is associated with photosensitivity and liver disease in horses, but is easily overlooked because of its similarity to the generally less toxic red and white clovers. If poisoning is suspected, the vet must be contacted immediately, and all animals removed from the pasture.

Pasture must be managed to control the spread of parasites and avoid the development of latrine roughs by regular manure collection (ideally daily). See [management tips for best practice](#) from Westgate Labs. There is government advice relating to dealing with equine manure that can be found [here](#). Factors to consider when siting a muck heap can also be found on the Westgate Labs website [here](#).

Where possible, the use of any chemicals on pasture should be avoided, but if necessary, must be carried out per the manufacturer's guidance (e.g. dosage, access).

Further information on managing pastures can be found on NEWC member websites (for example, [Pasture management](#), World Horse Welfare, [Keeping donkeys on small pastures](#), The Donkey Sanctuary).

5.1.2 Alternative grazing systems

Alternative grazing systems aim to enhance movement, access to forage, and companionship. Popular approaches include Equicentral, track systems, rewilding, woodlands or moorland. A short report on why they are used and the pros and cons of each approach can be found [here](#).

Using an alternative system will not necessarily improve equine health/welfare, but they are often adopted to address specific issues (including equine obesity and other issues relating to the environment and season). The success of each system is largely dependent upon resource availability, how they are managed, and the number and type of equines involved. In general,

hybrid systems that include features of different alternative systems allow bespoke adaptation according to resource availability, seasonal variation, and specific equine needs. Further research into the impact of these systems on equines and the environment (and human carers) is needed to enable evidence-based decisions to be made.

However, the use of track systems has become popular amongst some equine welfare charities, and the information below was compiled based on their experiences of using this system.

Track systems

This originated from the Jaime Jackson 'Paddock Paradise' approach, where the inclusion of different ground surfaces was included to promote hoof health (as well as movement). It is more common now for track systems to be based on grass OR all-weather surfaces, rather than including areas of stone, sand, gravel, etc. Generally, track systems are introduced to encourage movement, reduce grass availability, and allow for group living. They are useful for larger groups of equines kept in relatively resource-rich situations.

Reasons for use: Introduced as an alternative to open field grazing, to reduce grass intake while maintaining space for movement (as opposed to small areas being set up to limit grazing). They are used for those equines prone to obesity and related health issues such as Equine metabolic syndrome (EMS), laminitis and arthritis, to promote movement and weight loss. They allow group living, BUT group stability requires monitoring. Equine maintenance procedures can be carried out in situ if the track has been designed to allow for this. Separation of individuals (for example, for health issues or when introducing new animals to the group) from the group can be achieved by having adjacent tracks that allow proximity to the group to be maintained.

Setting up a track system.

Key considerations include:

- Optimal track width: 10–12m encourages movement.
- Flexible designs: Circular or figure-eight layouts work well.
- Safety measures: Avoid dead ends, increase width at corners to reduce pinch points.
- Shelter: Provide hard-standing and field shelters.

- Feeding: Distribute hay in small piles to encourage foraging and minimise poaching.

The initial set-up and maintenance will be costly (fencing, ground surfaces, maintenance). A track width of 10-12m was found to be optimum (much wider tracks, such as 20m, did not promote as much movement. A set-up that allows for adaptability is important, with gateways within track fences to allow for easy movement of animals (and humans) when required. Parallel tracks were found to be effective for this purpose. Options for closing off areas are important to avoid/limit poaching. Including 'pen' areas where individual animals can be contained while remaining next to the group is valuable for maintenance procedures, supplementary feeding, handling and other activities. The system should be set up to avoid dead ends (where animals could become cornered), and the width in corners should be increased to minimise the deleterious effect of pinch points. The length of the track will vary according to space availability, but simple circular/figure of eight designs seem to work well. The ability to alter the track design is useful as a means of introducing change/novelty to stimulate interest and exploration. Where track systems can be set up in hilly areas, this can be even more effective for weight loss and fitness. A variety of terrain and environmental features need to be included, where possible. Soil type/drainage needs consideration unless an all-weather surface is being installed.

In addition to established hedges that are useful for shelter, some form of hard standing with a field shelter and where a water supply can be sited, should be available. On grass (and other) tracks, hay can be fed in small piles on the ground to encourage movement while eating, but may result in poached areas (which would also result from static hay feeders). Soaking hay before feeding in this way may cause wet/poached areas and is hard to distribute, and while soaked hay could be sited on areas of hard standing, this would reduce movement.

Limitations: Cost, space, and the provision of resources. Track systems may negatively affect group dynamics and limit the ability to provide for the needs of individual equines. The efficacy of track systems varies seasonally, particularly when these are grass tracks that are affected by sward growth and mud. Most using grass tracks only do so during dry summer months. Some move to areas of standing hay over the winter months, but this must be done gradually by strip grazing for at least two weeks. Feeding hay can result in poached areas if using static hay feeders, and there is the potential for inter-equine aggression.

Introduction to the system must be gradual, particularly with grass tracks. If the grass is abundant, it can be grazed first by equines without a weight problem. Grass tracks may result in soil compaction, stressed grass, and weed growth. The latter may not be a problem depending on the prevalence and type of 'weeds', and more research is needed regarding the advantages and disadvantages of improved biodiversity within the sward. Soil ingestion is a potential problem, however, in bare grass areas, as well as an increased tendency for these areas to become boggy following rain. Manual collection of droppings on tracks of one mile or more would be human resource-heavy.

The tracks approach is unlikely to be advantageous for the environment unless very carefully managed. Some tracks are situated around a central area that is left for winter grazing, which, if left undisturbed over the Spring and Summer, may provide a valuable habitat for wildlife.

Further information relating to grazing systems can be found on the Blue Cross ([Grazing systems for horses](#)) and World Horse Welfare ([Alternative grazing systems](#)) websites.

Points to consider when selecting a grazing system:

- Any management changes must be made gradually
- No one system suits all – hybrids seem to offer the best solutions, with adaptability built in from the start
- Equine responses to the management approach must be monitored and changes made where appropriate
- The impact on human carers of managing equines in these different systems should be considered
- The impact on the environment must be considered*

Further research is needed to enable us to evaluate the impact of different approaches to management and devise recommendations for application

* See: [Furtado et al. \(2022\) An Exploration of Environmentally Sustainable Practices Associated with Alternative Grazing Management System Use for Horses, Ponies, Donkeys and Mules in the UK. *Animals* 12, 2.](#)

5.1.3 Fencing, water supply and shelter

Whatever grazing system is being used, the fencing must be safe and secure. Information regarding suitable fencing for different types of horses and ponies can be found on the British Horse Society's website [here](#). Recommendations relating to height, type and maintenance of fencing are included. Information about suitable fencing for donkeys can be found in the guidance produced by The Donkey Sanctuary: [Keeping donkeys on small pastures](#).

Key considerations include:

- Fencing: Must be safe, secure, and suitable for the equine type. Regular inspections and maintenance are vital.
- Water: Clean water should be available at all times, with provisions for freezing conditions.
- Shelter: Provide dry, sheltered areas for resting and feeding, especially for donkeys and hybrids, who require access to hard standing.

Hedges, if properly maintained, can provide shelter and shade, promote biodiversity, and create a living boundary (that may need additional fencing to ensure they are sound in terms of providing a secure barrier). Their soundness should be checked regularly throughout the year. As well as those hedging plants that must be avoided because of their toxicity to equines (including privet, leylandii, broom, box and laurel), wild cherry and bird cherry contain a cyanide-type compound that is toxic to horses and other livestock. Blackthorn is common in hedging, and has long, sharp thorns that can cause injury, as well as being toxic if eaten in large quantities.

In addition to the shelter provided by hedges and trees, some form of field shelter should be provided, particularly when the horses/ponies are predominantly kept at pasture. All equines should have access to a dry, sheltered area where they can stand, rest and access forage. Donkeys and their hybrids must have access to shelter and hard standing when kept outside/on pasture.

All equines always require access to a clean water supply. Guidelines regarding the provision of water in pasture can be found in the British Horse Society's information on [Pasture Management](#). Water supplies for donkeys are included in The Donkey Sanctuary's [Stable](#)

[Measurement Guide](#), with the details provided also being relevant for field-sited water supplies.

5.1.4 Housing and stabling

There is extensive evidence to support the conclusion that equine welfare is likely to be compromised by individual, restrictive housing. It is recommended that the equine home environment should be such that it provides the animal with adequate space and companionship. Unless required for health reasons, or for short periods as required for management/training procedures, individual housing should be avoided. If individual stabling is required, please refer to the British Horse Society's guidelines on [Stable safety](#) for information about the recommended dimensions and features that should be incorporated in stabling for individual horses. Information relating to the optimum stable sizes and layout for donkeys can be found in The Donkey Sanctuary's [Stable Measurement Guide](#).

When individual stabling is unavoidable, it should be considered how the negative impact of this on the animal could be reduced. Ensuring that at least visual contact with other equines is possible, adequate forage is provided, and where possible, daily group turnout is included, will go some way towards providing for the basic needs of the equine.

Including some form of enrichment to the equine home environment can contribute towards improved welfare, although this will not compensate for a lack of space, companionship and forage. Some suggestions for approaches to enrichment can be found on the [Enrichment](#) page of the Mare and Foal Sanctuary website.

5.1.5 In summary

Effective equine management requires balancing nutrition, social needs, health, and environmental stewardship. Hybrid systems often offer the best solutions, allowing adaptability based on seasonal variations and individual equine needs. Continuous observation and adaptation are key to ensuring equine wellbeing, positive mental state and a good quality of life.

5.2 Health

Both the physical and mental health of all equines is of paramount importance. The need to provide equines (horses and ponies, donkeys and their hybrids) with an appropriate physical and social environment cannot be overstated. Their need for space, companionship and adequate forage (the three F's of Freedom, Friends and Forage) must be satisfied for them to experience a 'good life'. See the previous section (Environment) for information on the design and management of the home environment, where animals spend most of their time. All equines require the opportunity to express natural behaviour (including social interaction, freedom of movement, play and foraging) and to access companions of the same species. The provision of adequate forage is integral to promoting horse health and a positive mental state. The need to consume sufficient forage and for an adequate time is a priority for all equines, with long gaps between access to forage being found to negatively impact health and behaviour. Where possible (health and weight permitting), access to forage should not be restricted, and when provided to group-housed animals, should be presented in a way that allows sufficient space for all individuals to access this with minimal conflict.

Equines have evolved to move continuously while grazing, and to survive on a diet of low-quality fibre. The way in which many are now fed and managed, as well as the increased nutritional value of 'improved' pasture, has resulted in equine obesity, and associated health issues (including laminitis, equine metabolic syndrome and arthritis), becoming a major welfare concern. The Blue Cross provides guidance on how to prevent and/or manage equine obesity, which can be accessed [here](#). World Horse Welfare has developed a resource to enable more accurate condition scoring in horses, which can be downloaded from their website advice page: [Weight: Is your horse the right weight?](#)

The Donkey Sanctuary has produced a guide to condition scoring for donkeys that can be found [here](#).

5.2.1 Monitoring health and behaviour

All equines should be monitored at least daily for signs of compromised mental and/or physical health. Changes in physical appearance (such as nasal discharge, facial tension,

external wounds, lameness) and/or behaviour (including changes in water consumption, feeding behaviour, general demeanour, response to humans, other equines and the environment) can indicate underlying health issues. The RSPCA have produced a Guide to conducting an equine health and welfare check that can be accessed [here](#). They also provide a useful guide to [understanding equine body language](#), including signs of stress, fear and pain. For additional information, the top ten health considerations can be found on World Horse Welfare's [Horse Health Essentials](#) pages. Signs of ill health are often very subtle in donkeys. See The Donkey Sanctuary's information on [signs of illness in donkeys](#) for further information.

Recognising behavioural signs of pain, or anticipation of pain, is important in the identification of health issues or discomfort associated with equipment or management practices. Differentiating between behavioural signs of fear and anxiety, and pain *per se* is challenging, but both together cause restlessness. In general, pain alone tends to result in reduced locomotion and reduced contact-seeking behaviour (avoidance of contact), whereas anxiety is shown by increases in locomotion, vocalisation, and contact-seeking behaviour. When avoidance behaviour is displayed, this may be indicative of the anticipation of pain, for example, during preparation for ridden work (including moving away during bridle fitting, or when being mounted), and the underlying cause must be identified and resolved. Individual equines vary in how they express pain behaviourally, so familiarity with the animal may help to determine whether such behaviour is indicative of pain or not.

Do not hesitate to call for veterinary support if you have any concerns regarding the health of an equine in your care.

5.2.2 Veterinary support

A nominated veterinary practice, experienced in equine care and with species-specific (i.e. type of equine) knowledge, should be used for both routine and emergency care. All investigation, diagnosis and treatment of equine health issues must be under the direction of a veterinary surgeon. The veterinary surgeon will be a key partner who provides professional advice on preventative and reactive health care plans. A health care plan for each equine should be agreed upon with the veterinary surgeon to include details of environment, diet, parasite control, vaccination, and other routine procedures. This must be supported by accurate and up-to-date records of all relevant interventions. The records of each animal's

ailments, vaccinations and treatments must be maintained and be available for reference by attending veterinary surgeons.

Equine passports must be made available to the veterinary surgeon on each visit. Information on equine passports and microchipping for England can be found [here](#). Note that there are different rules in [Scotland](#), [Wales](#) and [Northern Ireland](#).

5.2.2.1 Vaccinations

Vaccinations protect against equine infectious diseases (viral and bacterial), protecting both the individual and the wider equine population. Vaccination against certain equine diseases is mandatory in the equine sporting and breeding sectors. NEWC strongly recommends vaccinating all animals against tetanus and equine influenza, including those in loan homes. The National Office of Animal Health (NOAH) have produced information on Equine Vaccination (as well as other equine health topics) available [here](#). Regular vaccinations against equine influenza and tetanus are recommended for most horses, ponies, donkeys and their hybrids in the U.K. To protect against abortion caused by equine herpes virus, vaccinations should be given to pregnant mares during the 5th, 7th and 9th months of pregnancy. The Strangles vaccine is now available in the U.K. and has been shown to offer good levels of safety and effectiveness, with vaccinated horses either not developing signs of Strangles following exposure to the disease or experiencing milder and more short-lived effects. For further information relating to protecting your horse from Strangles and the vaccine, see guidance produced by Redwings [here](#). A summary of equine vaccinations commercially available in the U.K. in January 2024, as compiled by Equine Infectious Disease Surveillance (EIDS), includes equine herpes virus-1/-4, equine influenza, tetanus, strangles (*Streptococcus equi* infection), equine viral arteritis, rotavirus, and West Nile virus, and can be found [here](#). Equine viral arteritis and West Nile virus are both notifiable diseases, a list of which can be found [here](#). For vaccinations recommended for donkeys, see [Vaccinating your donkeys](#), guidelines produced by The Donkey Sanctuary.

5.2.3 Biosecurity

Everyone involved with equines (owners, members of staff, volunteers and anyone who has contact with the animals) must practice the highest practicable standards of hygiene and cleanliness throughout the premises where animals are kept. This will include taking all steps

necessary to prevent the spread of infection. Useful information regarding the promotion of good hygiene that can help to limit the spread of disease is available on the British Horse Society's advice pages titled [Equine disease prevention](#). They provide further information on preventing the spread of disease at events: [Equine disease prevention at events](#).

Quarantine facilities must be available to minimise the risk of infection being imported by new admissions to the premises. Detailed guidelines can be found in [the Redwings' quarantine and testing protocol for new and returning horses](#). These guidelines relate particularly to limiting the spread of the debilitating disease strangles, further information about which can be found on the [Redwings strangles hub](#).

During quarantine, bonded animals should remain together or within touching distance throughout all procedures and management processes, unless directed otherwise by a suitably qualified professional (veterinarian / clinical animal behaviourist). Note that donkeys must be quarantined with their companion (see [advice from The Donkey Sanctuary](#)).

5.2.4 Parasite management

Internal (worms, bot fly larvae) and external (lice and mites, bot fly eggs) parasites must be actively managed in line with up-to-date evidence on effective programmes and products. Emerging resistance to available products is a serious threat to equine health and welfare, and programmes should place emphasis on appropriate husbandry measures and control methods that are evidence-based (for example, using strategies such as faecal worm egg counts, saliva and blood tests to determine deworming requirements). For the avoidance of doubt, anthelmintics should only be prescribed when necessary. See the [CANTER project](#) for more information. As with the overall health plan, a parasite control programme should be developed and agreed upon with veterinary advisors. An [Overview of parasites affecting horses](#) is available on the Westgate Labs website. Although donkeys can be infected by the same parasites as horses, there are some notable differences in parasite dynamics and treatment regimes. See The Donkey Sanctuary's overview of endoparasite prevalence, control and clinical relevance in donkeys for further information: [Endoparasites in Donkeys](#).

5.2.5 Foot Care

All horses should have their feet regularly attended to by a professionally qualified and registered farrier (generally at least every 6-8 weeks). Registered farriers can be found on the [Find a Farrier list](#) of the Farriers Registration Council. Donkeys' feet are very different to horses' hooves, and the correct hoof care is important. They should also have their feet regularly attended to by a professionally qualified and registered farrier. The Donkey Sanctuary has produced information on how to keep your donkeys' feet healthy: [Guidance on donkey hoof care](#). See also the section on Allied Professionals.

5.2.6 Dental Care

Regular dental checks are essential to the health and welfare of horses, ponies, donkeys and their hybrids. Dental problems have the potential to cause significant pain, which may go unrecognised. Dental checks should be undertaken once or twice a year (unless dental issues require these to be carried out more frequently, as advised by a suitably qualified professional). These should be carried out only by Veterinary Surgeons and qualified Equine Dental Technicians (EDTs) who should provide the keeper with an updated dental chart following each examination and treatment. Information regarding what constitutes a DEFRA / RCVS-approved qualification and further details of the Equine dentist situation in the U.K. (produced by the Worldwide Association of Equine Dentistry: WWAED) can be accessed [here](#). A list of fully qualified British Association of Equine Dental Technicians (BAEDT) can be found on the [BAEDT website](#), together with area-specific lists. The Donkey Sanctuary note that dental disease is recorded as being the second most common clinical problem encountered in the donkey, after disorders of the feet. Donkey-specific dentistry guidance and advice can be found [here](#). See also the section on Allied Professionals.

5.2.7 Seasonal health issues

Seasonal variation in environmental conditions is associated with specific health issues in equines. Summer challenges include heat, sun, flies and other insects, pollen and arid conditions (the latter a potential cause of dry brittle hooves prone to cracking in animals turned out on hard ground). Light-coloured or pink-skinned equines are particularly susceptible to sunburn, and protective measures such as applying equine-specific sunscreen or using fly sheets with UV protection can help to protect them. Information on health issues

that are associated with summer conditions can be found [here](#), with further hot weather horse care tips provided by World Horse Welfare [here](#). Guidance on caring for donkeys during the summer can be found [here](#).

Allergies associated with pollen or biting insects are more prevalent during the Spring and Summer months, although those associated with dust, feed supplements or some medications can occur at any time of the year. In general, allergies affect the skin and/or respiratory system. See the British Horse Society's information on [Equine allergies](#) for details on the causes, signs and management of allergies.

Cold, wet conditions during the winter months present different challenges. However, if shelter is available and an area of hard standing or similar on which forage can be fed is provided, most horses and ponies cope well with overwintering outside. Additional checks on the water supply are necessary in freezing weather, and muddy areas should be avoided for forage provision. Some advice on caring for equines during the winter is available from World Horse Welfare: [Winter horse care tips](#). Consideration of the need for rugs should be made for each animal (dependent on age, type, condition, hair growth/clipping) and guidance on how to assess this need and how to recognise whether the horse/pony is too cold or (if rugged) too hot, is provided by the Blue Cross: [Caring for your horse in winter](#). The Donkey Sanctuary has produced guidelines on the care of donkeys through winter that can be accessed [here](#). Note that because donkeys' coats differ from those of horses, donkeys require access to man-made shelter as opposed to natural shelter alone.

Cold, wet weather, muddy ground and rainfall all contribute to the proliferation of the bacterium *Dermatophilus congolensis*, which results in skin infections. This bacterium normally inhabits the skin, but in wet conditions or when the skin is damaged, infection can occur. When this occurs on the lower limbs, it is referred to as mud fever; on other areas of the body, it is rain scald or dermatophilosis. Horses, ponies and donkeys can all be affected by these skin problems that are more likely in cold, wet conditions, but can occur at any time of the year. The Dick Vet Equine Practice has produced a factsheet that provides information on how to recognise mud fever and rain scald, and guidance on treatment and prevention. This can be accessed [here](#).

5.3 Breeding

Indiscriminate breeding and overproduction contribute to many equine health and welfare issues. Careful selection of both the dam and the sire, and a responsible approach to foal production, are prerequisites to ensuring supply does not exceed demand. Decisions relating to the selection of suitable breeding stock should be made based on many factors, including the size, age, health, conformation, temperament, past performance, and genetic potential of the dam and sire. In addition, the availability of resources and human expertise, as well as the potential role of any subsequent offspring, should be considered before any decision to breed is made. Producing healthy, balanced (both physically and mentally) individuals without extreme characteristics being selected for (for example, the equine equivalents of brachycephalics, including Welsh Sec A ponies) is of great importance to ensure the future welfare of these animals.

To promote good welfare within the equine breeding sector, where possible, husbandry methods need to align with natural equine reproductive behaviour. Currently, we do not have sufficient evidence of how common breeding practices (including artificial insemination and embryo transfer) and genetic modification potentials may impact on the resultant offspring quality of life. In addition, the practice of managing stallions and mares that are only kept for teasing, AI collection, surrogacy, etc., is questionable from an ethical standpoint and in terms of the negative impact this is likely to have on the animal's welfare.

The provision of a home environment that satisfies the species-specific needs of both sire and dam, and subsequently their offspring (for space, company, and forage: the three Fs) must be prioritised. The importance of social stability and access to an appropriate physical and social environment from birth onwards should not be underestimated. In natural equine reproductive behaviour, the potential importance of a fourth F (family) is evident. Management that incorporates a horse-centred approach to equine breeding is advocated.

Artificial weaning of foals from their dams inevitably causes some level of distress to both parties. The process can be made less unpleasant for the mare and foal by adopting a gradual approach to their separation. Foals should be kept in familiar social groups that include familiar adults, and in a familiar environment pre- and post-weaning. The provision of a stable social group, freedom to move and adequate forage should lessen the negative impact on the

mare. In addition to short-term benefits, management practices that aim to reduce the negative effects of weaning on foals have also been shown to promote improved long-term health and well-being.

5.4 Behavioural signs of mental state

Opportunities for the expression of behavioural signs of mental state are dependent upon social and physical resource provision. Where movement is limited (for example, by housing type such as individual stables, or the use of restrictive equipment during handling and/or training), some insights can be gained from the general demeanour of the animal and responses to humans and other stimuli. Signs of positive mental state in this case include a calm, relaxed stance (see [RSPCA guidance 'Understanding your horse's body language'](#)) and the ingestion of forage. During interactions with humans, again, a relaxed posture and tendency to approach the human are indicative of an underlying positive mental state. Affiliative intra-species behaviour is also associated with a positive mental state, but can only occur where access to companions is provided. Where the underlying behavioural needs of the animal are not being met, behavioural signs of a negative mental state are more frequently observed. These include withdrawn or agitated behaviours in situ, avoidance behaviour during handling and agonistic/aggressive intra-species interactions. The absence of such behaviour should not, however, be considered as evidence that the animal is in a positive mental state. Equines may exhibit unresponsive behaviour, which is indicative of a mental state akin to human depression.

Some confounding factors limit the extent to which equine behaviour can be used to assess mental state. These include individual differences in behavioural expression, the age, type and sex of the animal, and importantly, the training of the animal. Just as a lack of 'negative' behavioural signs should not be interpreted as evidence of positive mental state, compliance with procedures/interactions is more likely to be the result of previous training, rather than indicative of positive experiences.

Some signs of stress in equines, where the animal is trying to cope with undesirable aspects of their environment or management, are discussed in the British Horse Society's advice page

on [Equine stress](#). Behavioural signs of mental state in donkeys may be more subtle and hard to read, and this is explained in The Donkey Sanctuary's article on [How to understand donkey behaviour](#).

Regardless of individual or species-specific differences in how equine behaviour reflects mental state, no animal can live a good life unless their behavioural needs are met, they are healthy, and their experiences are predominantly positive (pleasant). Providing all equines with the potential to live a good life should be the aim of everyone involved in the care and management of horses, ponies, donkeys and their hybrids.

5.5 Handling and training

Domestic equines are required to perform different roles in their interactions with humans and are subject to many and varied activities and procedures. It is likely that many, if not all, of these interactions are initially aversive experiences for the equine. Any form of handling and training will at first be challenging; however, by adopting a compassionate and consistent approach, it should be possible to make interactions with humans a more positive experience. As noted in the previous sections, the satisfaction of underlying behavioural needs for friends, freedom and forage, as well as ensuring that the animal is in good health (both physical and mental), underpins good equine welfare. If, in addition, interactions with humans can be made predominantly positive experiences, then it will become more possible for all domestic equines to live a good life. Developing approaches to handling and training that acknowledge and align with features of equine behaviour, including the correct application of learning theory/general principles of training, and take account of factors that can affect behavioural responses, will be beneficial for both equine welfare and human safety.

5.5.1 Behavioural assessment

Throughout the handling/training process, behavioural signs of how the equine is responding in general and to specific activities in different situations and environments should be monitored, and before commencing any type of training (or handling), an initial behavioural assessment should be carried out. Previous experience of interactions with humans, or lack thereof, will largely determine their initial behavioural and emotional response to human

contact. Where the animal has previously been handled by / interacted with humans, the tendency for the equine to approach, avoid or ignore individual humans can be used as an indication of whether past interactions have been positive, negative or neutral experiences. The extent to which such behavioural responses occur may also be determined by previous training and/or physical restraint, which results in a lack of movement/response during handling. This has been shown even in young foals where early restrictive training has been used, resulting in a subsequent reduction in physical avoidance responses. However, in general, young animals tend to show more pronounced behavioural responses than adults, although the associated physiological responses (indicative of anxiety, stress) have been found to be greater in adult animals. Overt behaviour is not always a clear indication of how the animal is feeling/responding to a situation, with individual differences in emotional expression being found regardless of age and previous experience. Although both horses/ponies and donkeys show signs of fear and anxiety in new situations, there are some differences in how this is expressed behaviourally. Behavioural signs in donkeys are often quite subtle. Signs of fear, anxiety and pain may be less obvious than in horses, so careful attention is vital to ensure they are not missed. Some examples of these species-specific differences can be found in The Donkey Sanctuary's guidance on [Understanding the Differences Between Donkeys and Horses](#).

When assessing equine behaviour, it is important to recognise and respond to:

- General signs of anxiety, fear, and/or pain
- Behavioural responses in specific situations and before, during and after specific procedures
- Responses to interactions with humans (approach, avoid, ignore)
- Unresponsiveness, listlessness / depressed behaviour (which may result from the cumulative effect of repeated, unavoidable negative experiences)
- Changes in behaviour from what is 'normal' for the individual equine

Although behaviour is influenced by factors such as training, restrictive equipment, age and individual differences, it still indicates how specific situations and events are experienced by the equine and of the animal's general mental state. Both in turn will affect how the equine responds to handling and training. By interpreting what the horse, pony or donkey is communicating by behaving in a certain way, handling, training and indeed health and welfare

problems can be averted. Some examples of horse behaviours that might be indicators that something is wrong can be found in World Horse Welfare's [Behaviour Checklist](#).

5.5.2 Principles of handling and training

Prior to commencing training, the animal should be checked by a vet to identify any health issues or potential sources of pain or discomfort. For feral/unhandled equines, there must be suitable facilities available to enable access to veterinary care in the short term and in a safe manner. For all animals, an individual training plan should be put in place that is appropriate for the type, physical and mental abilities, experience and future role of the equine. The duration and frequency of training sessions must be suitable for the equine involved, taking into consideration factors including age, fitness, and level of training, and the effect of this on the animal monitored. Positively reinforced / reward-based training should be used, and the handler/trainer must have relevant experience (and qualifications where appropriate) in the training protocols. To ensure consistency, all staff, volunteers, and anyone involved in handling and training must receive an induction in the principles and methods used.

As well as registering behavioural signs of negative experiences, it is also important to be aware of behaviour indicative of positive experiences. As quality of life is dependent upon the balance between positive and negative experiences (over time), the more that interactions with humans can be made pleasant experiences for the equine, the better their quality of life. This underlying principle can be applied to all aspects of handling and training. If the equine is behaving in a way that is suggestive of an unpleasant (negative) experience (signs of fear, anxiety, pain, avoidance, aggression), the process should be paused, and the methods reviewed and revised to remove the source of this negativity. Conversely, if the equine is behaving in a way that suggests that the experience is pleasant (positive) (signs of interest / exploratory behaviour, approach, affiliative behaviour), then this approach should continue, and the factors contributing to this positive experience identified and applied in other scenarios. In short, do more of what the equine enjoys and less of what they don't.

Adherence to the LIMA (least invasive, minimally aversive) principles, as promoted by the International Association of Animal Behaviour Consultants (IAABC), should be used to guide all aspects of equine management and training. Some necessary procedures may be unavoidably aversive (veterinary procedures, for example), but any negative impact can be

reduced by ensuring that these are only carried out by those with appropriate skills/qualifications and that they are completed as quickly as possible. All training practices should be ethical, using methods that are least inhibitive and as functionally effective as possible, an approach developed in the LIFE model (see: [Fernandez EJ. 2024. The least inhibitive, functionally effective \(LIFE\) model: A new framework for ethical animal training practices. *Journal of Veterinary Behavior* 71: 63-68](#))

Initially, interactions with humans and the early stages of handling and training will be challenging (and frightening) for most equines. Novel situations, equipment and procedures are likely to be a source of stress. Progressive desensitisation to novel, but not harmful, occurrences should be used to introduce each aspect of this process slowly to the animal. Methods that avoid creating anxiety/fear should be used.

In summary, handling/training should be:

- Appropriate for the individual equine
- Carried out by an experienced handler
- Be a predominantly positive experience for the equine
- Reviewed continuously and methods revised as necessary

Further details relating to the principles of horse training and the application of learning theory are provided by the International Society for Equitation Science in their '[10 First Principles of Horse Training](#)'. The equestrian sector has outlined underlying principles to be upheld to protect the physical and mental well-being of the horse in [The Charter for the Horse](#).

The Donkey Sanctuary offers courses in donkey behaviour, management and training via their Donkey Academy. Information relating to these courses can be found [here](#).

5.5.3 Factors that influence behaviour during handling and training

Handling and training are more effective and less stressful for the equine if carried out, at least initially, in familiar surroundings (where positive experiences have occurred) and in the company of other (familiar) animals. There is evidence that emotional responses (including fear, anxiety, excitement, and calmness/relaxation) transfer between animals (of the same species and others), as well as from human to equine (and potentially from equine to human).

Carrying out handling and training in the company of more experienced, calm (habituated) animals has been shown to reduce the negative impact of potentially stressful situations and procedures and facilitate effective training.

Sudden, unexpected responses during both handling and ridden training, to startling occurrences are impossible to avoid, but there will be individual variation in when and to what extent they occur. Such reactions are more likely if the animal is isolated from other equines, the situation is novel and/or the procedure is unfamiliar or associated with previously negative/unpleasant experiences. From a human safety point of view, familiarity with the individual equine and an awareness of potential sources of fear/distraction, as well as the selection of a 'safe' and familiar environment, will all reduce the likelihood of such responses causing problems.

As noted above, in the '*Principles of handling and training*', the approach, duration and frequency of training sessions must be appropriate for the individual animal. The characteristics of individual animals and their physical and mental capabilities must be considered when planning a training schedule, and the match between animal and training approach is a major factor that will influence subsequent behaviour. Also, any source of pain or discomfort, either current or potentially associated with aspects of handling or training, will result in negative experiences and inevitably attempts at avoidance.

5.5.4 Human behaviour

Human behaviour determines how the equine experiences all aspects of handling and training. In general, training aims to control and/or influence equine behaviour and develop associations between human-generated signals and the required behavioural response. To ensure that the process is not a negative experience for the animal and that the desired outcome (from the human's point of view) is achieved, the following guidelines should be adhered to:

- Those people involved in training and at least the initial handling of equines should themselves be trained in the approaches used and suitably experienced. When people/handlers are being trained, and for those who are inexperienced, pairing with experienced, less reactive equines is important to protect equine welfare, facilitate successful training and maintain human safety.

- During all interactions with equines, people should remain calm, patient and positive.
- All of those involved with handling and training equines should develop an understanding of innate equine behaviour, behavioural tendencies and potential sources of equine fear.
- When handling/training an individual animal, the handler should become familiar with their individual behavioural tendencies and adapt their own behaviour accordingly.

To keep up to date with evidence regarding equine behaviour and training, people involved in training and handling equines should participate in CPD where appropriate.

5.5.5 Ridden / other work

The same principles of training apply to those equines whose roles include ridden work. When assessing how equine behaviour reflects their experience of being ridden, it is important to consider their behaviour during tacking up and preparation, and during the mounting process. Attempts at avoidance at any stage could signify negative anticipation in relation to being ridden (pain, fear, anxiety, distress, confusion).

If equines are being ridden, riders must be of a suitable size, weight and competency to avoid injuring animals. When pairing equines and riders, as noted above (in the section on *Human behaviour*), an inexperienced rider should be mounted on a calm, experienced equine. It is very important that the rider is not too large or heavy for their mount, or indeed, too small. The British Horse Society (BHS) has guidelines on how to match riders with horses that can carry them comfortably, which can be found [here](#). Where horses are ridden by different riders, they should have the maximum weight they can carry identified on their records. For an example of how this is calculated, please see the Riding for the Disabled Association's guidelines: [Weight Chart Guidance](#). Donkeys should be carefully assessed to determine the maximum rider weight they can carry. Detailed guidance to protect the welfare of working donkeys is available from The Donkey Sanctuary and can be found [here](#).

5.5.6 Saddlery (Tack and Harness)

Any tack and equipment used must be correctly fitted and regularly checked for both fit and safety. Periodic checks of equipment will reduce the potential for injury/discomfort caused by ill-fitting tack. All harness and tack must be suitable for the purpose and properly fitted,

with professional advice being sought as required. The tack and/or equipment should be appropriate for the individual equine and rider (if for ridden work). Tack or equipment that restricts movement and has the potential to cause pain or discomfort should not be used (for example, tight nosebands, certain types of bit, including Chifneys). Restrictive equipment is also likely to mask behavioural signs of how the horse is responding to the action of that equipment and/or signals from the rider. When horses are to be ridden or worked, saddles and harness/tack must be fitted by a suitably qualified person. [The Society of Master Saddlers](#) (SMS) encourages the manufacture, maintenance, and expert fitting of saddlery of the highest quality and standard and provides a list of qualified members. Checking for fit and safety should be carried out twice a year by a SMS qualified master saddler to take account of changes in equine shape that can occur for several reasons, including fitness level and weight. The BHS have information on saddle fit that can be accessed [here](#).

Donkeys and hybrids are a different shape from other equines and, as such, require species-specific harness and tack. All tack used should be clean, well-maintained and appropriately fitted to the individual donkey. The donkey needs to be introduced and become accustomed to the tack during the training period. Information on the fitting and suitability of tack can be found [here](#).

5.6 Transport

Equines must be transported in a way that does not cause them harm or distress. This applies regardless of the mode of transport involved, but the following guidelines relate to road transport specifically. All transportation is likely to cause some level of physical and mental stress, and the first consideration should be whether the planned journey is necessary. When transportation is required, careful planning and preparation will reduce the potentially negative impact on the equine and improve safety. The risk of equine (and/or human) injury during transportation is associated with many factors, including road traffic incidents, vehicle design and lack of maintenance, driving style and a lack of preparation and/or training of the equine(s) being transported. There is a greater risk of injury when equines are transported in groups, in feral animals and during long journeys. Although it is not possible to remove all transport-related risks, the NEWC Standards, as supported by the following guidelines, aim to

reduce those risks, as well as providing details of relevant legislation and regulations for maintaining the welfare of animals during transportation.

5.6.1 Transporting equines in your own vehicle

Equines can be transported by road in either horseboxes or trailers towed by a suitable vehicle. There are different regulations governing these two forms of transport regarding the requirements for design and safety checks, driver qualifications, and vehicle capacity. Both types of transport vehicle must be checked regularly for safety and mechanical soundness, with a thorough check carried out before every journey. Regardless of the vehicle type, driving style is a major contributory factor that determines the experience of the equine during transportation. Careful planning of the route to avoid stops, sharp bends and congestion, forward planning to avoid sudden braking and smooth cornering will all help to reduce the negative impact of road transport.

A summary is included below, with full details of requirements for transporting equines available from the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency's [guidance on Transporting Horses in Horseboxes and Trailers](#).

5.6.1.1 Horseboxes

Horseboxes require annual Ministry of Transport testing (MOT). In addition, horseboxes with a gross weight of more than 3,500kg must have ministry plates and plating certificates. Further information on when plates and plating certificates are required, the vehicle information included on the plate and how this can be amended can be found in the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency's [guidance on HGV and trailer ministry plates and plating certificates](#). This information applies to England, Scotland and Wales.

Checks on internal fittings, floors, and ramps are not included in these inspections, so regular and pre-journey checks are required:

- Regular inspection of the floor is imperative, with care taken to check for deterioration under any covering (for example, matting).
- Checks should be made on internal fittings, including breast bars, partitions, internal stalls, as well as on the loading ramp (avoid standing directly behind the ramp when raising or lowering this – stand to one side)

Speed limits: Speed limits for horseboxes are the same as for goods vehicles (of not more than 7.5 tonnes maximum laden weight on single carriageways 50mph (80kph), on dual carriageways 60 mph (96kph), and motorways 70mph (112kph), 60mph (96kph) if articulated or towing a trailer. The speed limits for horseboxes more than 7.5 tonnes maximum laden weight are different in Scotland (S) as compared with England and Wales (E/W) (on single carriageways E/W 50mph (80kph), S 40mph (64kph); on dual carriageways E/W 60mph (96kph), S 50mph (80kph); on motorways both E/W and S 60mph (96kph).

5.6.1.2 Trailers

All vehicles used for towing require an MOT. There are weight and width limits on what can be towed by a vehicle. The maximum weight they can tow is usually listed in the vehicle's handbook or specification sheet. Alternatively, the vehicle's 'gross train weight' (the weight of the fully loaded car plus fully loaded trailer, which must not be exceeded) should be listed on the vehicle identification number (VIN) plate on the car (normally under the bonnet or inside the driver's door). If no train weight is listed on the VIN plate, the vehicle should not be used for towing.

The maximum trailer width for any towing vehicle is 2.55 metres.

If the vehicle's [maximum authorised mass \(MAM\)](#) is 3,500kg or less, you cannot tow a trailer that's longer than 7 metres.

If your vehicle's MAM is more than 3,500kg, then the maximum lengths (not including the A-frame) are:

- 12 metres for the trailer towed by the vehicle
- 18 metres for the vehicle and trailer combined

Details of these towing limits can be found [here](#).

Safety checks: These should be carried out every time you tow a trailer with a car. Full details can be found on the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency [guidance on safety checks when towing](#). These include:

- [Checks before you tow](#)
- [Tow ball and connections](#)
- [Wheels and tyres](#)

- [Lights and indicators](#)
- [Load and weight limit](#)
- [When you're driving](#)
- [Get a free safety check](#)
- [More information](#)

In addition, it is vital that you check the floor, ramp and internal fittings (including breast bars, partitions, internal stalls) of the trailer for signs of wear/safety.

Speed limits: The National Speed limits apply to all single and dual carriageways with streetlights, unless there are signs showing otherwise. These are the same for built-up areas:

- 30 miles per hour (48km/h) in England, Scotland or Northern Ireland
- 20 miles per hour (32km/h) in Wales

Outside built-up areas, when towing a trailer, the speed limit on single carriageways is 50mph (80km/h), on dual carriageways and motorways 60mph (96km/h).

Driver requirements (horseboxes and trailers)

This information is available in the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency's [guidance on Transporting Horses in Horseboxes and Trailers](#).

You need to make sure you have the correct [driving licence category](#). This will depend on the size, type of vehicle you're using, and when you passed your driving test.

You can check online to [see what vehicles you can drive](#).

You should check if you need a [Driver Certificate of Professional Competence](#) if you're driving a horsebox that has a maximum authorised mass (MAM) over 3,500kg.

When towing a trailer, [check](#) whether you're old enough or have the right kind of licence to tow a trailer from different kinds of vehicles.

5.6.1.3 Driver training

Whether transporting equines in a horsebox or trailer, ensuring that the journey is as smooth and stress-free as possible is of utmost importance. As noted above, it is important to plan the route carefully and avoid potential hazards/queues and other factors that have the potential to increase the duration of the journey. Driving as smoothly as possible, avoiding

any sudden changes in speed or direction, is vital to allow the transported animals to maintain balance and remain as calm as possible. Clear signage on the transport vehicle is important to make other drivers aware that they must expect only slow and gradual changes in direction and speed.

It is highly recommended that all drivers receive training before towing a trailer. The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) has developed a syllabus ([learning to drive a car and trailer syllabus](#)), and some organisations offering this training can be found on the GOV.UK [Towing with a car](#) page.

You usually need a full Driver Certificate of Professional Competence (CPC) to get a certificate of competence for transporting animals in a heavy goods vehicle (HGV). An operator licence is required if you use horseboxes or a vehicle and a horse trailer, and you either:

- are paid money (directly or indirectly) to transport equines
- receive payment (directly or indirectly, for example, from prize money) for transporting horses
- use the horseboxes for a professional activity

You do not need an operator's licence if you're only transporting horses or goods for non-commercial purposes (such as leisure activities).

Details of the required qualifications and training can be found [here](#).

5.6.1.4 Drivers' hours rules

There are rules on how many hours you can drive and the breaks that you need to take if your horsebox or vehicle and trailer either:

- has a maximum authorised mass (MAM) of 3,500kg or more and is used for commercial purposes
- has a MAM of 7,500kg or more

You also need to:

- follow [drivers' hours rules](#) for goods vehicles
- use a [tachograph](#)

You do not need to follow drivers' hours rules if your horsebox or vehicle and trailer has a MAM less than 7,500kg and is used for non-commercial purposes (such as leisure activities).

However, from an equine welfare perspective, the shorter the journey, the better.

5.6.2 Selecting a commercial transporter

When hiring a commercial transporter, it is important to check their experience in equine handling and driving with equines on board, their training and credentials, and the safety checks carried out on their vehicle. There are two levels of commercial transporter (Type 1 and Type 2), which relate to the level of competency required and the necessary vehicle safety, ventilation and temperature checks. These are more extensive for Level 2 transporters. See the information provided by the BHS ([Transporting your horse](#)) for further information.

5.6.3 Breakdown cover

When transporting your equine, if using a trailer, check that your breakdown cover includes recovery of this as well as the vehicle. Also, whether any breakdown cover includes equine-specific recovery of your horse, if they cannot repair your vehicle at the roadside. See the BHS information on [transporting your horse](#) for further details.

5.6.4 Equine welfare during all transportation

Guidance on how the welfare of animals must be protected during transportation can be found [here](#). See also [The Welfare of Animals \(Transport\) \(England\) Order 2006](#).

Key points for ensuring transportation does not compromise equine welfare include:

- Ensuring the animals are fit to travel (see: [Practical Guidelines to Assess Fitness for Transport of Equidae](#) for further information).
- Prepare the animal for all aspects of transport (loading, travel, unloading and recovery) by careful training and a gradual introduction to each stage
- Travel all equines with a companion whenever possible
- Plan the journey carefully and make it as short as possible
- Check the animals during the journey (with cameras to view the animals) and meet their needs for water, feed and rest

- Use a transport vehicle that is designed for equine safety and comfort, is well maintained, and is driven by a qualified, experienced driver
- Ensure that at least two people are involved in the transport (driver and trained attendant to monitor equine well-being, both skilled in equine handling)
- Select a safe environment for loading and unloading the animals to avoid injury and suffering
- Make sure the animals have enough floor space and height to maintain their balance. Details can be found in the World Horse Welfare [Recommendations for the Transport of Equines](#).

Good ventilation in horseboxes and trailers is essential to equine well-being. For commercial journeys over 8 hours, ventilation in horseboxes and trailers must comply with [Animal Welfare Regulations](#). For example, vents must be able to run when the engine is off for at least 4 hours and maintain temperatures between 5°C and 30°C.

Although it is unlikely that the physical and mental stress associated with transportation can be removed altogether, by careful preparation and training of the equine, driver training, selection of a well-designed transport vehicle, and regular safety checks, the potentially negative impact on equine welfare can be reduced.

5.6.5 Transporting feral, unhandled, untrained equines

Unbroken equines must not be transported in groups of more than four and must not be transported for more than 8 hours. Specific consideration must be given to the construction of the transportation being used to transport feral, unhandled or untrained equines to ensure their safety, e.g. partitions should be solid and to the floor.

5.7 Re-homing equines

NEWC encourages welfare organisations to re-home their animals, whenever appropriate, through a 'loan' scheme. Although the schemes practised by NEWC members may have different titles, the underlying principles remain the same. Most loan schemes are based on the principle that the organisation retains ownership of the animal, whilst others may decide to transfer ownership after a suitable probationary period.

Although NEWC has no specific guidelines relating to such schemes, organisations must remain conscious at all times of their ongoing legal responsibilities to ensure the continued well-being of the animals wherever they are on loan. However, equines must be visited at least annually. The loan conditions should be specified in written agreements made between the organisation and the borrowers.

5.7.1 Advantages

The organisation can make space for the acceptance of new animals, so more equines can be cared for by the organisation over a given period.

Equines can be placed in loan homes where they will receive a level of individual attention that would be difficult to achieve if they remained as part of a larger herd at the organisation.

Loaned equines may be part of smaller, stable social groupings, which may be beneficial to the mental well-being of some individual animals.

Costs are spread, with the loan home taking responsibility for the animal's upkeep.

5.7.2 Management

The cost of administering a loan scheme is a major expense requiring time, resources and staff. It is unacceptable, and a potential breach of Animal Welfare law, to place an equine on loan without ongoing support and oversight.

An agreed management procedure is required to ensure that equines are matched with the appropriate home. To avoid any confusion, the written Terms and Conditions of the loan must be clearly explained to potential loan homes before the movement of animals into their care. These documents should be signed by both parties, who should also retain copies of the agreement.

Follow-up home checks should be carried out regularly and recorded by trained and competent designated representatives of the organisation to ensure the continued well-being of the animal and to provide support and advice to the borrower whenever required.

5.7.3 Choice of Home

Organisations loaning equines must be particularly careful to match the equine with the loan home's requirements. Failure to do so may mean the equine being returned as unsuitable, the equine suffering negative welfare from deterioration in the equine-borrower relationship, and potentially for a complaint being made against the organisation. The term borrower is used throughout this section to refer to the named individual who will remain responsible for the care of the equine. Details of the planned role of the loaned equine, the experience of the loan home, and the facilities available for the animal should all be considered against the characteristics and requirements of the potential loan equine. As well as a home visit before the loan, the prospective borrower should visit and interact with the loan equine in situations likely to occur if the loan goes ahead.

Borrowers should be able to demonstrate a sound knowledge of, and competence in equine husbandry (specific to the species of the potential loan animal), and provide details of their experience and/or qualifications, as well as being observed by the organisation in practical situations. If the equine is loaned for riding, their riding competence must be sufficient to manage the animal in the activities in which the borrower wishes to engage. It is important to ensure that less experienced borrowers are matched with calm, experienced equines, whether ridden work is included or not. If a potential loan equine requires a more experienced handler/rider (or is unbacked), the ability of the potential borrower should be very carefully assessed (for example, by observing them handling/riding a less challenging equine first).

Potential loan homes must be made aware of the extent of their responsibilities for the cost of caring for the equine. Whenever appropriate, organisations may consider the inclusion of an estimate of the cost of basic care, together with the potential for unforeseen expense resulting from injury or illness to the equine. This will allow the loan home to assess whether he /she is able and willing to meet /undertake such expenditure should it become necessary.

NEWC recommends that all potential homes be inspected for suitability before loan by a trained and competent representative. The facilities on offer should be suitable for the individual equine(s) and species and provide adequate resources for the number of individuals (please refer to the **Environment** section). Homes must ensure all companions are

species appropriate, to avoid antagonistic/ conflict behavioural responses, potential injury and other welfare concerns.

The loan home must be able to meet all the needs of the equine, including specific reasonable requirements set by the organisation above minimum requirements under animal welfare legislation, and the NEWC standards for keeping equines. These should include provision of suitable companionship; a safe, hazard-free environment with secure, well-maintained fencing and shelter (which should always be accessible for donkeys if relevant); and appropriate management to ensure good health and welfare.

It is preferable that this is carried out in person, but if it is deemed suitable to be conducted virtually, the first visit once the equine is rehomed should be carried out in person and within 3 months of rehoming.

Please refer to the relevant sections for specific, detailed information. The information outlined above should be included in the Loan Agreement (see relevant sub-section below).

5.7.4 Re-homing or loan procedures

The following are suggested steps in the re-homing / loan procedure:

- Initial reception and assessment of the equine at the welfare establishment.
- Rehabilitation and training, where required.
- Applications from potential loan homes are sought and processed.
- Selection of potentially suitable loan homes for the equine. This process may require more than one visit.
- Initial home/facilities check, potential borrower assessment, and discussion of requirements at the loan home.
- Potential borrower introduced to equine and trial handling/ride (if appropriate) at the organisation's premises/equine's location. Equine and potential borrower interactions are assessed and evaluated. This process may require more than one visit.
- Additional health check of the animal immediately before re-homing.
- Equine is homed, both parties having signed the rehome/loan agreement. Phone/e-mail support provided as required.

- Follow-up home check takes place verbally (phone call) within one month, with an in-person visit at about three months.
- Assure the loan home that follow-up advice from the organisation is always available
- Regular home checks are continued. Some may be unannounced, if felt necessary.

5.7.5 Loan agreements

Several NEWC member organisations have their own Loan Agreement forms, which can be adapted by others who may contemplate such a scheme. Details of these can be obtained from the NEWC office.

Formal loan agreements are necessary to safeguard the welfare of the equines and to set out the respective responsibilities of the organisation and the borrower. Both parties must sign the agreement, each then keeping a copy. The agreement should include details of:

- The equine – including species, age, height, sex, breed, colour and markings, together with microchip and passport numbers. The description should also include, if appropriate, the type and level of work to which the equine is suited and any specific restrictions on its use.
- The owner – the welfare organisation.
- The borrower – this is the named individual who will remain responsible for the care of the equine, regardless of whether the day-to-day tasks are delegated to a third party. It should also be noted that all parties concerned with ownership or care of the animals are liable under UK Animal Welfare legislation.
- The location – where the animal is to be kept.

The following details should be included in the Loan Agreement:

5.7.5.1 Responsibilities of the Borrower

(See also relevant sections for further details.)

- Keep the animal in a sound and healthy condition, including the provision of the necessary level of care, shelter and housing.
- Be responsible for the cost of items such as insurance, feed, farriery, dentistry, veterinary care and all other associated costs, as detailed in the Loan Agreement. Full written records must be kept of all such visits and treatment.

- Ensure that the animal's feet are properly maintained through trimming by a competent person /shod by a registered farrier as necessary (normally every 6-8 weeks) to maintain healthy and well-balanced feet.
- Adhere to the welfare organisation's policy and procedures/ veterinary guidance regarding worm control. This will normally include regular dung sampling to identify the presence and type of infestation, which will determine the necessity and type of worming treatment that may be required. (See section 5.1.1)
- Ensure that vaccinations against equine influenza and tetanus are kept up to date.
- Ensure that teeth are regularly checked (usually annually) by a veterinary surgeon or qualified equine dental technician.
- Ensure that the equine has a suitable equine field companion. This is particularly the case in respect of donkeys, which have a propensity to form strong bonds of friendship.
- Notify the organisation immediately if they move the equine; if they are unable to continue to offer the required level of care; or if the equine undergoes any veterinary treatment.
- Notify the police and the organisation immediately, should the equine become lost or missing.

5.7.5.2 Passports

It is a legal requirement that passports relating to individual animals must accompany them to their new location. Borrowers must be advised of their responsibility for the safekeeping of these important documents, which must also accompany the animals when they are moved (even on a temporary basis) from the premises where they are normally kept.

Borrowers must also be advised of the need to produce passports for inspection during each visit by a veterinary surgeon to record all vaccinations and be aware of the status of the animal within the food chain, as indicated in Section 1X of the passport.

Organisations are strongly recommended to keep a photocopy or other accurate record of the details of each passport.

5.7.5.3 Inspections

The borrower must agree to allow access at any reasonable time by the owner (i.e. an authorised representative of the organisation) to inspect the animals and their conditions under which they are being kept.

5.7.5.4 Restrictions of Use

The borrower must comply with any reasonable restrictions on use placed upon the equine. These may include:

- Use of the animal for activities that are unauthorised by the owner
- Turning out the equine with any animals known to be dangerous or diseased, or when the pasture contains any poisonous plants
- Breeding from the equine
- The riding of animals loaned as companions or that are unsuitable for riding
- The riding of equines by any person other than the borrower, other than a person specifically authorised to do so by the organisation.

A policy should be established about the use of Loan horses, ponies, donkeys or mules for commercial purposes or the promotion or support of other charitable or non-profit-making activities (e.g. donkeys at Palm Sunday church services; equine participation in Equine Assisted Services).

5.7.5.5 Humane Destruction

Agreement is required that, in the event of an equine suffering from a severe illness or accident and a veterinary surgeon advising that the equine must be immediately destroyed to prevent further suffering, the borrower will have the equine humanely destroyed immediately.

The borrower will, at the earliest practicable opportunity, notify the owner and supply full details of the nature of the illness or injury, circumstances of the accident (if appropriate), date of destruction, together with a copy of the veterinary certificate authorising and certifying the destruction.

When an equine dies or has been euthanised, the animal's passport must be returned to the organisation that will, in turn, return it to the relevant Passport Issuing Office (PIO).

5.7.5.5 Insurance

NEWC recommends the inclusion of a mandatory condition of the loan agreement that places responsibility on the borrower to maintain a current third-party insurance policy which indemnifies him /her against claims arising from keeping the equine(s). Evidence of this insurance should ideally be witnessed annually at each home visit and recorded.

Potential borrowers should insure for the cost of veterinary fees relating to the equine. Individual insurance companies may have restrictions on equines that are not owned by the person seeking the cover, and may have restrictions on the age of the animal and the amount that may be claimed. Some may also require a copy of the signed agreement showing details of the owner and the conditions of the loan.

Where insurance for death or destruction of the equine is in operation, an agreement must be made with the borrower to ensure the welfare organisation is informed if an equine is nearing the end of their life or is to be euthanised, and to determine who receives the insurance payment.

Where 'Third Party' activities are permitted in relation to the inclusion of equines in commercial or non-profit making (including marketing) activities, it is important that the insurance company is aware; some companies charge an additional premium for this

5.7.6 Regular home checks

Equines on loan must be inspected at least annually, either in person or virtually. The timing of in-person home visits should not exceed two years. In some organisations, the date and time of the visit are made in advance, while others make unannounced visits, but the borrower must be made aware of the organisation's policy concerning this. Representatives of organisations should take steps to develop a harmonious and effective working relationship with borrowers to ensure that visits are made at mutually convenient times and that they are appropriate to the needs of the borrowers and the welfare of the equine.

Checks should include: the equine's body condition; availability and condition of shelter, feeding, water, companionship and security; inspection of health records, equine passports and third-party insurance certificates. Details should be recorded regarding records of foot care, dental, faecal egg counts, and vaccination.

A written record of all visits must be made at the time of the visit, with any concerns or shortcomings being brought to notice at the time, together with an agreed timetable for such matters to be addressed. Suitable support for requested improvements should be offered and recorded where appropriate. Both parties should sign and keep a copy of this report.

5.7.7 Returns

There are several reasons why equines may need to be returned to the loaning organisation. Appropriate procedures, processes and documents must be in place to facilitate such returns, with the borrower being made aware of these at the outset.

5.7.7.1 Change of Circumstance

Organisations setting up loan schemes should make annual provision for a percentage of animals to be returned through unforeseen changes to borrowers' circumstances. Such contingency should be made for those equines, even though it will adversely affect the number of new equines that can be admitted.

It is not uncommon for equines to be loaned to homes where responsibility for their day-to-day care is delegated to a member of the family or a knowledgeable member of staff. In such circumstances, the organisation must be aware of any changes that may adversely affect the equine's welfare.

5.7.7.2 Enforced returns

In exceptional circumstances where the organisation believes that the equine's welfare is not being adequately catered for despite advice being given previously, if the equine is involved in third party activities not specified in the Loan Agreement (see above), or if the equine is in immediate danger due to abuse or neglect, it may be necessary to remove the animal to the custody of the organisation. This contingency must be clearly defined within the terms of the agreement and explained to the borrower.

5.7.8 Transfer of ownership

Some organisations include the potential for transfer of ownership in their loan schemes. This should only be considered after a minimum number of visits (including in-person visits) have been conducted over an established loan period, to ensure (as far as is reasonably possible) the long-term health and welfare of the equine(s) concerned. A suitable agreement stating

the terms of the transfer should be in place and include criteria for any ongoing support or the return of the equine. The terms of the transfer must be documented, with parties signing and retaining a copy of this agreement.

Before transfer of ownership from the organisation to the Rehomer, a minimum of one on-site in-person visit should be carried out during a suitable loan period of at least 6 months to ensure, as far as reasonably possible, the long-term health and welfare of the equine.

5.8 Educational establishments

It is acknowledged that most equine organisations and individuals concerned with supporting and improving equine welfare will include education in their remit. Those utilising equines as part of the delivery of their curriculum required the development of the Education section within the NEWC standards and guidelines for keeping equines. Those educational organisations that do not keep equines but have a focus on the provision of educational material and associated qualifications (for example, the British Horse Society, BHS) should promote and uphold the NEWC general standards (see Section 3).

All education and training should be evidence-based and promote practices that optimise equine welfare. These include management that satisfies the equine's species-specific need for friends, freedom and forage (the three Fs), an ethical approach to training and husbandry, activities/interactions that are predominantly positive (pleasurable), and an improved understanding of equine behaviour and how it reflects underlying subjective experience. All these factors contribute to equine physical and mental health. There is increasing public concern regarding the inclusion of animals in sport and leisure activities, and without changes that emphasise the need to improve welfare in our interactions with equines, the equestrian sector will lose their social licence to operate.

Academic institutions offer equine courses in Further Education (FE) and/or Higher Education (HE), with the course content being guided by qualification awarding bodies. The curricula must include topics pertinent to optimal equine welfare, as identified above. The courses offered may include practical stable management and riding experience, some with the option of BHS qualifications. FE awarding bodies for equine qualifications include Edexcel, BTEC, LANTRA / City and Guilds, Scottish Vocational Qualifications, OCNLR, for example.

HE provision will be validated by an awarding HE provider (usually a university) who is required to meet the ongoing conditions of registration with the Office for Students (OfS), including the associated quality and standards conditions (B conditions). The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) provides advice on the quality and academic standards of HE provisions and provides subject benchmark statements to guide the development of HE courses within the U.K. Equine HE courses are included in the subject benchmark statement for Agriculture, Rural Environmental Sciences, Animal Studies, Consumer Science, Forestry, Food, Horticulture and Human Nutrition. The areas of subject knowledge, understanding and skills expected in HE equine undergraduate courses are included in the 'Animal Studies' section of the [QAA Subject Benchmark Statement](#) published in April 2024. Included in these are subject areas specific to improved animal welfare:

- How quality of life can be optimised using evidence-informed management and practice to ensure positive welfare.
- Global, national and local sustainability of animal management and practice.
- Social and ethical issues associated with animal management and practice.
- The importance of human-animal interactions to society and the need to consider animal welfare in all interactions (for example, in sport, therapy and education).

A challenge for equine education establishments is to ensure that the management and training of equines is based on current evidence and consistent with current principles of optimising welfare. Effectively, they should both practice and teach optimal approaches to equine welfare, which are evidence-based and related to the individual equine and site context. The inclusion of equine management and ridden work, as well as applied research in HE provisions, results in the equines that are kept in educational establishments being required to fulfil several different roles, alongside supporting a huge range in student ability and knowledge. The NEWC standards for keeping equines (concerning governance, environment, health, handling and training, and transport) apply to those equines (see previous sections), with additional standards being relevant when they are fulfilling an educational role. The yard may be approved by the BHS and/or Association of British Riding Schools (ABRS) and must have a Local Authority licence for the hiring/keeping of animals for exhibition (The Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018). Policies must be in place to protect equine welfare, as well as staff and

student safety. Where the yard includes loan animals, and/or working liverys, a loan agreement must be put in place that specifies management and workload details, as well as the responsibilities (financial and other) of the owner/organisation, which is signed by both parties.

5.8.1 Staff responsibilities

The yard manager or equivalent is responsible for the welfare of all equines on the yard. This includes overseeing management and nutrition, health status, equine workload planning, allocation of equines for specific activities and the initial approval for research projects to be carried out at the educational facility and/or involving equines housed at the yard. The yard manager should be supported by senior management to prioritise optimal equine welfare.

If equines are involved in practical and/or taught sessions (ridden/unridden) or research projects, students must be supervised by experienced staff who are suitably qualified for the session/activity they are overseeing. Supervisory staff should be familiar with the natural behavioural repertoire (NBR) of equines, signs of anxiety, fear, pain, and individual variations therein. A system for reporting concerns regarding individual equines or occurrences within sessions or activities that could compromise equine welfare must be in place, with these being reported immediately to the yard manager.

For both ridden and unridden taught sessions, equine allocation must be carefully considered, with successful matching of equine and rider/practical requirements being critical to maximise equine welfare and meet the learning requirements of students.

5.8.2 Equine workload planning

Equines involved in education are generally selected for their temperament and experience, as well as for their physical suitability for the roles required. Individual animals will vary in how well they cope with life in an educational setting, both overall and within specific activities, and it is important that the needs of individual animals are met. Their behaviour, and importantly, any changes in behaviour, must be carefully monitored to ensure that positive or negative signs are noted and appropriate action taken to protect the welfare of the individual equine. All equines must be pain-free and in good health, both mentally and

physically, to participate in their allocated activities. Allocation of equines to specific roles should be overseen by the yard manager or other suitably experienced person.

Care plans should be available for all individual equines, to include their overall workload plan specifying the maximum number of hours per day, and days per week that they can participate in **all** activities (including ridden work, practical sessions and research). The institution should have an overarching policy(s) that covers workload and allocation approaches that are publicly available. The total number of hours calculated should take into account the type of activity concerned. The maximum rider weight that each equine should carry must be recorded, as well as any other limitations relating to suitable rider characteristics/type of ridden work. The yard manager should oversee rider allocation, with this information being made available to relevant teaching staff.

All equines must be provided with adequate rest periods on a daily, weekly, monthly and annual basis.

5.8.3 Resources

The environment in which teaching sessions and activities are conducted should be safe and secure for equines, staff and students. Facilities should be suitable for the type of session/activity (size, configuration, proximity to other facilities, ground surface that provides safe footing for equines and people). All resources should be checked regularly for signs of wear and tear, and safety. Tack and equipment used must be suitable for the individual equine, and if training equipment is used for demonstrations or taught sessions, this should only be done under the supervision of appropriately qualified, experienced staff. All equipment must be regularly checked at least every 6 months for fit, wear and tear, and safety by a Society of Master Saddlers (SMS) qualified master saddler. See also the section on Handling and Training.

5.8.4 Research

No staff or student research that could negatively affect the quality of life of the participating equines should be carried out. The initial approval of any research project that involves equines housed at the academic institution's yard, or involves their participation in a research project, should be by the yard manager or equivalent (whoever has overall responsibility for

the welfare of the equines on the yard). If student DIY livery animals are involved, agreement from the owner would be required. Those responsible for the welfare of the equines must be consulted as part of the Ethical approval process and acknowledged on the subsequent application form. The allocation of equines for the research project should be made by the yard manager or equivalent. All projects must be submitted to the relevant Ethical Review Committee and should have a clear aim that is addressed by the proposed methodology, with the potential for generating results that are of value. An important part of experimental design that should be included in student research training is that the project must not only have no negative impact on the participating equines, but also be well justified and avoid increasing their workload to no apparent gain. The balance between providing the student with data collection experience and subjecting the equine to additional (unnecessary?) interactions should be considered.

5.9 Equine Assisted Services

The National Equine Welfare Council, in collaboration with HEIR, developed standards of practice for providers of EAS to protect and enhance the welfare of participating equines. The following guidelines include the NEWC standards for EAS providers, underpinned by the general principle that **all equines should be managed in a way that satisfies their species-specific needs**. Further details relating to specific aspects of equine management can be found in the previous sections within these guidelines.

NEWC promotes registration with the [Human Equine Interaction Register](#) (HEIR) to all NEWC members and associates involved in the provision of EAS. The Equine Assisted Services Partnership manages the Human Equine Interaction Register (HEIR), which serves the EAS provider and trainer community to ensure that minimum standards for equine welfare are applied alongside good governance, service user involvement and measured outcomes. NEWC promotes HEIR registration to all new NEWC EAS applicants to align with best practice standards for both humans and equines.

All equines must be managed in a way that provides them with adequate access to friends, freedom, and forage, and ensures that their welfare and well-being needs are met. Exposure to potentially aversive experiences should be avoided, and an evidence-based approach to the interpretation of equine behavioural responses should be adopted. Both experiential and

scientific evidence relating to behavioural needs and behavioural responses should be considered. This is an evolving area which will be reviewed and updated as required. To date, the focus has been primarily on the benefits that EAS has for the human participants, with less consideration of the impact on the equine. Currently, many equines involved in the provision of EAS have retired from previous roles and may have underlying health issues. Consequently, the nature of their involvement in EAS sessions must be guided by the prevention of any activities that could negatively impact health, and no animal showing any signs of pain or discomfort should participate. EAS provision includes both mounted and unmounted sessions, and the criteria for selecting suitable equine participants will vary accordingly. In general, those involved in mounted sessions will tend to be fitter and trained for this purpose, with sessions more likely to be of a standard duration. Equines involved in unmounted sessions are likely to experience less consistency both in the type and duration of the session and during interactions with humans. Both mounted and unmounted roles are challenging for the equines involved, albeit in different ways, and their health and behaviour must be carefully monitored.

The NEWC standards focus on the health and behaviour of the participating equines, and on the type, frequency and duration of EAS sessions. Under equine health and behaviour, the selection of equines (who must be in good health, pain free and mentally sound), their preparation and training, and the monitoring of their behaviour pre-, during and post-EAS sessions, are the main areas included in the NEWC standards. If horses are working alone during EAS sessions, prior training should be completed to ensure they are comfortable doing so. If donkeys are being considered for EAS, they must never work alone and always be with at least one other equine, preferably their bonded friend.

The provision of a suitable environment in which to conduct the sessions, the duration, frequency and type of activities included in EAS sessions, and activities/life outside of these sessions are included in the NEWC standards. For full details, see the NEWC Accreditation Standards for EAS.

All practitioners are expected to reflect on the potential impact that EAS sessions have on equine welfare, and most importantly, how behavioural responses (or lack thereof) are indicative of equine subjective experience. The following standards were developed for application across all modalities of EAS. In addition, a written policy/procedure that relates to

the specific modality of EAS practised by the organisation (including ridden and driven sessions) is required, to ensure that the welfare of the participating equines is not compromised during the sessions.

In addition to the NEWC member standards for EAS and the specific standards for the modality of EAS provided, international guidelines on care, training, and welfare requirements for equines in equine-assisted services are available. The Federation of Horses in Education and Therapy International AISBL (HETI) published their [Equine Welfare Ethical Guidelines](#) in April 2020, updated in 2023. The International Association of Human-Animal Interactions Organisation (IAHAIO) published international guidelines for the care, training and welfare requirements for equines in EAS in February 2021, which can be accessed [here](#). These are based on a review of evidence of current best practices and research, which is reviewed every two years.

In addition to the NEWC member standards for EAS and the specific standards for the modality of EAS provided, international guidelines on care, training, and welfare requirements for equines in equine-assisted services are available. The [IAHAIO international guidelines](#) provide further best practice guidance for meeting the care, training and welfare requirements for equines involved in delivering equine-assisted services. These are based on a review of evidence of current best practices and research, which is reviewed every two years.

6. CONCLUSION

The NEWC Standards Guidance provides a comprehensive framework for achieving and maintaining high standards of equine welfare across the UK. By adhering to these standards, NEWC members and associates demonstrate a commitment not only to legal compliance but also to the proactive enhancement of equine quality of life through evidence-based and compassionate care.

As equine welfare science evolves, NEWC encourages all members and associates to remain informed, reflective, and adaptive in their practices. Collaboration and shared learning across the network are vital to driving continuous improvement and innovation within the sector.

We thank all NEWC members and associates for their dedication to animal welfare and their contributions to raising standards across the equine community.

Should you have any questions, require support with compliance, or wish to share examples of best practice, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

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Resources and Downloads: All referenced SOPs, checklists, and templates are available via the NEWC members' portal or by direct request.