



HORSES IN OUR HANDS


31 HORSE 'CAREGIVERS',
OWNERS AND PROFESSIONALS

62 WELFARE ISSUES RAISED

3 ROUNDS OF CONSULTATION

20 EXPERTS IN THEIR FIELD

4 WELFARE PRIORITIES

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- Chapter 1** introduces the equine industry to provide a context for the research
 - Chapter 2** describes horse welfare from the perspective of 31 horse caregivers
 - Chapter 3** reports how 20 industry experts identified 4 welfare priorities
 - Chapter 4** takes an in-depth look at the 4 welfare priorities
 - Chapter 5** introduces the role of welfare assessment in improving equine welfare as discussed by 26 stakeholders during 6 focus groups
 - Chapter 6** identifies routes to welfare improvement focusing on the 4 welfare priorities

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EQUINE WELFARE IN ENGLAND AND WALES

This report documents a three year research project carried out by a multidisciplinary team of researchers at the University of Bristol:



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The research sought to understand the welfare status of horses in England and Wales. In particular it aimed to identify the priority welfare issues currently faced by horses and to explore horse owner and industry experts' perceptions around these.

The research methodology placed stakeholder engagement at the centre. We asked those connected to horses to provide insight into the welfare issues facing horses, and to share with us their personal experiences of ensuring welfare for the horses whose care was in their hands.

Horse owners, riders, trainers, vets, farriers, welfare charity workers and industry governing body representatives, to name but a few, all contributed to the research. These participants were interviewed, took part in focus groups and workshops and carried out prioritisation exercises, all with the over-arching objective of gaining an in-depth understanding of equine welfare in England and Wales.

This research will facilitate focused and co-ordinated efforts to improve the welfare of horses in England and Wales.

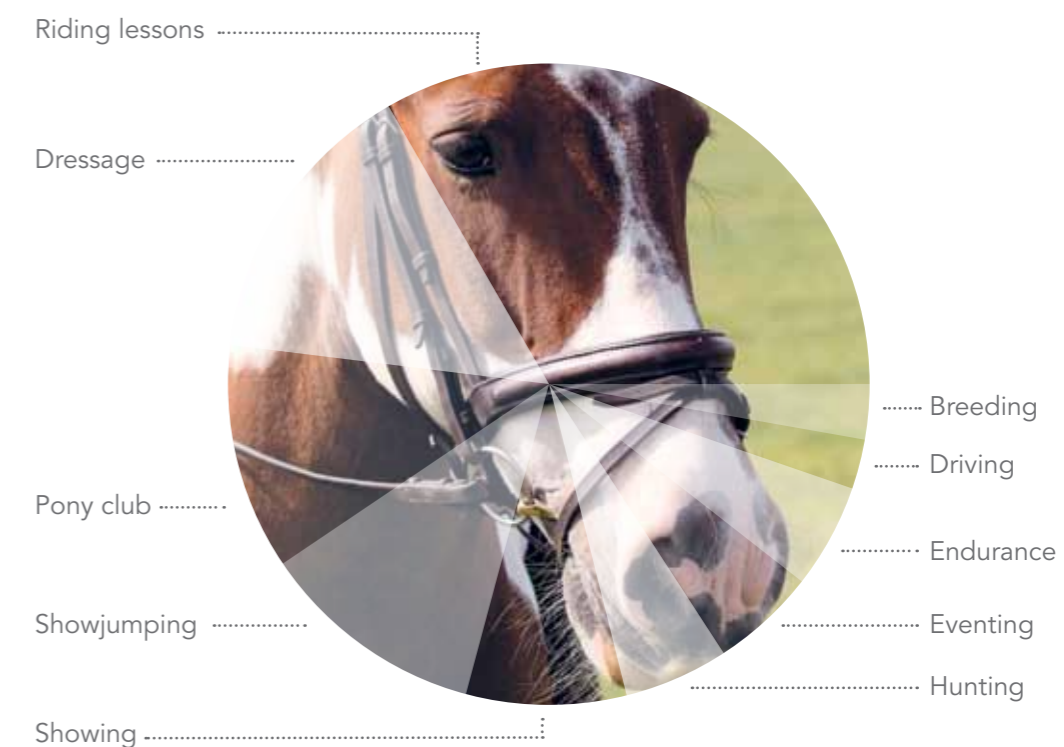
CHAPTER 1 Introduction to horses in England and Wales

The welfare of horses in England and Wales sits within the context of a large and varied industry. Only by considering the overall structure of the industry, including the numbers of horses and their uses, is it possible to identify the priority welfare issues for the whole population.

Despite the legal requirement since 2009 for horses in the UK to be registered it is challenging to estimate the number of horses in the UK. A short-lived central database of registered horses, the National Equine Database, was operational from 2006-2012. This was used by researchers to estimate the likely maximum number of horses in Great Britain as **1,350,000**. Ninety-two percent of these horses were estimated to reside in England and Wales (Boden et al 2012). The British Equestrian Trade Association's National Equestrian Survey 2015, using a different methodology, estimated there were 944,000 horses in Great Britain in 2015, a reduction of 4% since 2011 (BETA 2015).

Horses have had a varied role in British history, being used for centuries as draught animals for agricultural purposes as well as for military and leisure pursuits. Over the last century their agricultural and military roles have all but gone and horses are now kept almost exclusively for a variety of leisure activities.

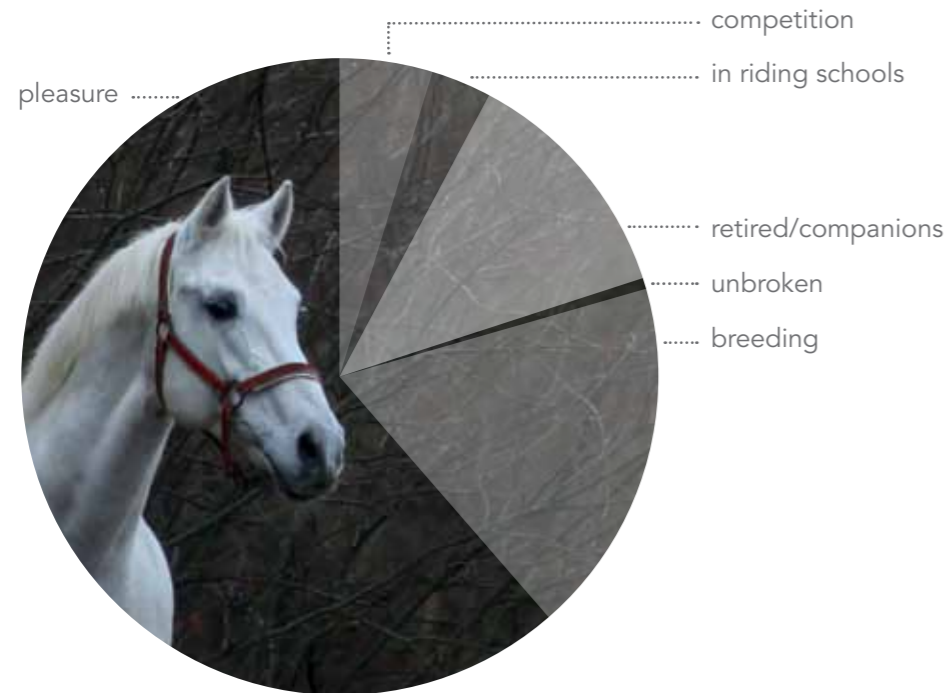
In an online survey of 4417 Great Britain horse owners who, between them, were responsible for 17,858 horses, hacking (leisure riding) was the most common activity undertaken by respondents (87% of people took part at least twice a month). However, many owners and presumably some horses, were regularly taking part in multiple activities, including:



(Boden et al 2013)



Wylie et al (2013) surveyed 797 owners by contacting them through their veterinary practices and found that the primary uses of horses were as follows:



Not only are horses used for different activities but they are kept in a range of settings. Hotchkiss et al (2007) identified a range of places in which horses are kept:



REFERENCES

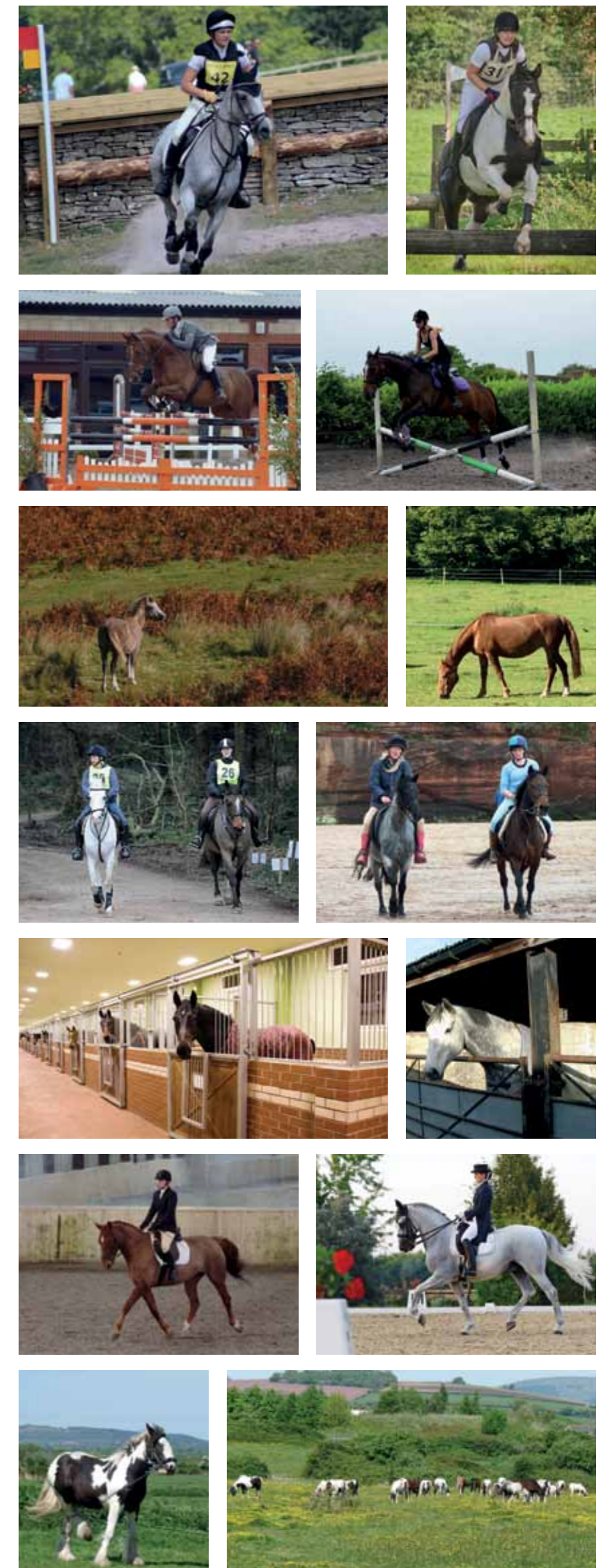
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 WYLIE, C. E., IRELAND, J. L., COLLINS, S. N., VERHEYEN, K. L. P. & NEWTON, J. R. 2013. Demographics and management practices of horses and ponies in Great Britain: A cross-sectional study. Research in Veterinary Science, 95, 410-417.

This diversity in the activities of horses and places they are kept means that any overview of equine welfare should reflect the care provided to horses and the physical and mental expectations placed on all horses right across the range of contexts in which they are found.

From the outset it was apparent that capturing the broad range of experiences that people had in caring for and interacting with horses, and their associated views on horse welfare, would be essential to genuinely understand the welfare of horses in England and Wales. We therefore consulted with people involved in a wide variety of equine activities.

Chapter 2 describes views of horse welfare gathered from 31 stakeholders, chosen to ensure a cross section of horse uses and contexts were represented.





CHAPTER 2 Perceptions of the welfare of horses in England and Wales

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

At the start of the project relatively little was known about the welfare of horses in England and Wales. Therefore, in the first instance, scoping research was carried out to explore the way in which equine stakeholders understood the concept of welfare, including what they perceived to be 'good' and 'poor' welfare. We were also interested in stakeholders' perceptions of the welfare issues faced by horses in England and Wales.

METHODS

In-depth interviews were carried out with 31 people who, through either work and/or for pleasure, had day-to-day contact with horses. Stakeholders interviewed included horse owners, vets, farriers and trainers. The aim was to consult a broad range of stakeholders. The interviews were semi-structured, based around 4 key questions:

- 1: What does the phrase 'equine welfare' mean to you?
- 2: What results in a horse having 'good' welfare?
- 3: What results in a horse having 'poor' welfare?
- 4: What examples of poor welfare have you seen?



LIST OF INTERVIEWEES:

Dressage trainer

Professional, freelance dressage trainer/rider. Trains dressage riders and competes in dressage. Horse owner

Livery yard owner

Owner of a livery yard catering for leisure horse owners. Horse owner

Driving coach

Carriage driver and driving coach

Farrier 1

Farrier mainly working with leisure horses. Horse owner – horse out on loan

Senior welfare charity worker

Deputy head of welfare at an equine welfare charity

Horses at home

Leisure horse owner with their own horses and children's ponies kept at home

Freelance instructor/groom

Freelance instructor and groom working largely with pony club clients

Horse loaner

Loaner of a leisure horse who keeps their horse on a livery yard

Showjumping trainer

Qualified British Showjumping (BS) coach. Breeds and produces showjumping horses

Rehabilitation yard owner

Rehabilitation yard owner who manages post-operative horses, horses coming back into work after injury and horses with behaviour problems. Competes at dressage. Horse owner

Farrier 2

Farrier shoeing leisure horses, with a particular interest in remedial farriery

McTimoney practitioner

McTimoney and sports massage practitioner. Horse owner

Field officer 1

Welfare charity field officer. Horse owner

Race trainer

Racing (jump) trainer

Abattoir owner

Abattoir owner and horse meat exporter

Endurance rider/ riding school owner

Endurance rider and riding school owner



Knackerman

Owner of a knacker business. Also owns horses and does some breeding

Owner of a retired horse

Owner of a retired leisure horse. Has bred two foals from the retired horse. Administrator in an equine hospital

Traveller

Leisure horse owner and member of the travelling community. Breeds horses for carriage driving. Horses kept in local fields

Point to Point rider

Point to point rider and regular hunter. Hunts their own horse and rides point to point horses for a trainer

Trading Standards officer

Trading standards animal welfare officer. Horse owner

Equine podiatrist

Equine podiatrist. Horse owner

Welfare centre manager

Manager of a welfare centre. Horse owner

Welfare charity groom

Groom at a welfare centre

Field Officer 2

Welfare charity field officer. Horse owner

Vet 1

Vet working primarily with leisure horses. Loans a horse over the winter to hunt

Leisure horse owner

Leisure horse owner with horse on a livery yard

New Forest pony owner

Owner of (semi-feral) ponies kept on the New Forest. Breaks in and sells home-bred ponies

Vet 2

Vet dealing with mainly leisure horses. Owner of leisure horses kept on their own land

Polo

Polo player, event rider and breeder of thoroughbreds. Runs a polo yard and family member competes internationally

Show pony owner

Owner, breeder and rider of native show ponies



KEY FINDINGS

- During the interviews there was little reference made to scientific definitions of ‘welfare’. Instead, stakeholders explained their understanding of welfare in the following ways:

1: Good welfare was seen to be about meeting the needs of the horse through the provision of resources:

“...it brings to mind straight away, are they being looked after properly in terms of enough food, enough water, fresh air, exercise...”
(Showjumping trainer)

There was not always agreement over which resources are necessary to ensure welfare:

“So my horses, from my point of view, go out as much as they can do because it’s really important for their brain and physically to go out and let off steam and all that kind of thing.” *(Dressage trainer)*

“I think the stabled 24 hours a day, seven days a week works really well for most horses...”
(Point to Point rider)

2: Good welfare was also seen to be about the emotional experience of the horse and a positive mental state was often linked to ‘natural’ living:

“...well generally I think you want a horse to have as much natural time outside as is physically possible ... I think generally you want them to experience being outside, with other horses, enjoying the fresh air and enjoying grass because that’s what a horse is all about.” *(Leisure horse owner)*

3: The concept of ‘welfare’ was understood and discussed by many as a negative term. Examples of ‘poor’ welfare brought up were often situations where non-compliance with the welfare legislation was suspected and severe neglect or suffering had occurred:

Words such as “suffering” “neglect” “cruelty” and “abuse” were often used in relation to welfare.
“At the vets I’ve seen, you know we’ve had RSPCA cases bought in and stuff so you see the really malnourished...and we get them because they’ve collapsed in the field basically and they’ll be very, very ribby and full of worms...”
(Owner of a retired horse)

4: ‘Poor’ welfare was seen to be a problem for other people and their horses:

“I think a lot of people don’t bother feeding. You see fields full of ponies turned out, and they’re looking awfully skinny, not being fed enough. You don’t see that a lot round here.”
(Horses at home)



- 40 specific welfare issues affecting horses in England and Wales were discussed by the stakeholders interviewed:

Category	Total number of stakeholders discussing	Welfare problems raised by 10 or more interviewees (number of interviewees)	Welfare problems raised by fewer than 10 interviewees (number of interviewees)
Health	31	Underweight (20) Poor feet/foot care (18) Overweight (12) Internal parasites (11) Laminitis ¹ (10)	Dental problems (9) Skin problems (9) Lameness (7) Metabolic diseases (5) Musculoskeletal problems(4) Strangles ² (3) Genetic defects (3) Foot abscess (2) Colic (abdominal pain) (1) Dehydration (1) Azoturia ³ (1)
Management	31	Stabling horses 24 hours a day (19) Underfeeding (14) Inappropriate rugging ⁴ (13) Lack of water (12) Overfeeding (12) Social Isolation ⁵ (10)	Incorrect feeding (7) Tethering (6) Inappropriate worming (4) Not vaccinated (3) Over-clipping ⁶ (2) Overstocking (2) Fly grazing ⁷ (1)
Riding / Training	23	Inappropriate use of training aids (e.g. whips and spurs) (13) Poorly fitting tack (11)	Breaking in ⁸ / ridden too young (9) Rollkur ⁹ (5) Over biting ¹⁰ (4) Lack of clear aids ¹¹ (4) Heavy handed riding (3) Unbalanced riders (3) Over working (3) Not warming horses up / cooling them down properly (3) Rapping ¹² (3)

(Footnotes)

- ¹ Laminitis is an inflammatory foot condition
- ² Strangles is an infectious respiratory disease
- ³ Azoturia is a condition causing muscle cramp
- ⁴ Putting too many or too few rugs on a horse
- ⁵ Horses kept without visual and/or physical contact with other horses
- ⁶ Removing too much of a horses’ coat using clippers
- ⁷ Grazing horses on land without the owners’ permission
- ⁸ Training the horse to accept a rider

- ⁹ Riding horses with the horses head and neck in a hyper-flexed position
- ¹⁰ A bit is the metal bar in horses’ mouth used when riding. Riders may use ‘strong’ bits to help control a horse
- ¹¹ For example, not clearly asking the horse to ‘stop’ or ‘go forward’ resulting in confusion on the part of the horse
- ¹² Rapping is a training technique used to encourage horses to jump higher and avoid knocking show jumps down. The pole is raised as the horse jumps over the fence so that the horse knocks its legs on the pole, thus encouraging the horse to make a greater effort the next time.

In addition to the 40 specific welfare issues raised, the interviewees discussed 12 broader contexts in which they believed horse welfare in England and Wales was compromised.

Context	Number of stakeholders raising	Examples or description as given by the interviewees
Horses kept in unsuitable environments	19	Physical hazards, poached ground, poor quality/no grazing including presence of ragwort, small (taped off) paddocks, buildings in poor condition.
Inappropriate 'use'	15	Riders trying to get their horses to do things that the horse is not physically capable of, including dressage movements or jumps. Horses being asked to do things which they are not physically fit enough to do. The administration of drugs to enhance the horses' performance or enable the horse to be ridden.
Where behaviour is misunderstood	15	Particularly linked to pain and 'stress' behaviour which may be misinterpreted. Problems were seen to occur when either the behaviour is dealt with aggressively, e.g. through physical and/or verbal punishment and/or when the root cause of the behaviour is not addressed.
Changing owners / Moving yards	14	This was seen to be associated with changes in routine and feeding and linked with physical and mental welfare problems. Interviewees felt that horses can fall into the 'wrong' hands - particularly linked to horses with 'problems' who become low value and may be bought by inexperienced people. Where 'problem' horses continuously change owners problems may be exacerbated.
Abandonment	12	This term was used in a variety of ways: To describe horses which had truly been abandoned (disowned); to describe horses which had been put out to pasture and had little owner input; others discussed how some horses were cared for at a livery yard, but were 'abandoned' by their owners who didn't come to visit them.
Transportation	10	Particularly discussed in the context of long distance travel and associated with exhaustion and dehydration. Problems associated with loading were discussed including the use of 'force' to get horses on to the lorry.
Where horses don't match expectations	8	Where horses are bought to perform a particular function, for example to compete at a particular level, problems can occur when the horse can't perform that function. Linked to horses becoming low value and being sold.
Where euthanasia is delayed	8	Interviewees discussed how some people keep horses alive, usually for sentimental reasons, despite the horse not having a good quality of life.
Horse / rider / owner incompatible	8	Particularly linked to people buying horses which they do not have the experience or ability to ride/manage. Discussed more in terms of human welfare (safety) but it was also implied that this may have consequences for the horse e.g. the horse gets dubbed as a 'bad' horse and so becomes low value (see above).
Where people own too many horses for their resources	6	People own more horses than they can afford/have time for. Linked to people buying horses without knowing how much commitment is involved. Also linked to people 'rescuing' horses and then not being able to care for them.
Inappropriate routine	6	Included in this were: disrupted routine, routine based on the owner not the horse, too rigid a routine, doing things which the horse is not used to.
Work/exercise unvaried	5	Horses which only do one type of work, for example horses which are only ever ridden in an arena. The implication was that they may be worked too intensively and/or not allowed to relax or that the horse would be bored.



SUMMARY

Equine stakeholders have their own understanding of 'welfare' which is independent of the definitions created by welfare scientists. For many 'welfare' is a largely negative term and poor welfare is often seen as someone else's problem. Good/poor welfare is perceived to relate to the provision of resources AND the emotional experience of the horse. 40 specific issues and 12 broader contexts were identified. As such, our stakeholders identified a total of 52 welfare issues that they perceived to affect horses in England and Wales.

Horses in England and Wales were perceived to experience a wide range of welfare issues and a total of 52 issues were identified. In order to make the greatest positive impact on equine welfare the most serious and/or prevalent welfare issues needed to be identified. Chapter 3 describes how 20 equine industry experts prioritised these welfare issues.

- **Root causes associated with poor welfare**

Whilst talking about welfare the research participants discussed 8 'root causes' associated with poor welfare.

These were:

- Lack of knowledge
- Poor advice seeking behaviour (for example not asking for advice or asking the wrong person for advice)
- Lack of finances
- Indiscriminate breeding
- The fact that horses are viewed as commodities
- Welfare legislation failures
- Passport legislation failures
- The high cost of euthanasia



CHAPTER 3 Identifying the priority welfare issues facing horses in England and Wales

PURPOSE

The initial research revealed that horses in England and Wales were perceived to experience a wide range of welfare issues. Prioritisation was necessary to identify the most significant welfare issues for horses. The welfare 'impact' of any issue can be thought of as incorporating the severity of the suffering, the duration of the suffering and the number of horses affected. By identifying the most important welfare issues, based on these criteria, future efforts to improve equine welfare can be strategic and targeted.

METHODS

A consultation with 20 experts who had industry-level knowledge of the significance of the welfare problems facing horses was carried out. The experts included veterinary surgeons, equine behaviourists and representatives from industry governing bodies and equine welfare charities.

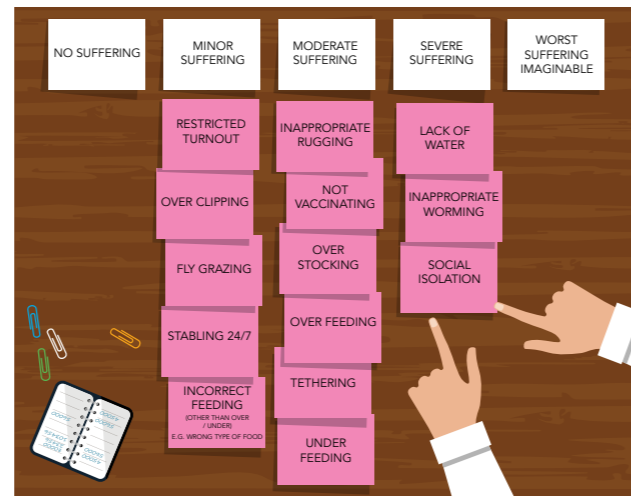
The consultation was carried out over three rounds and was based initially around the 52 welfare issues that emerged during the research reported in Chapter 2. An iterative approach was used whereby each round informed the next, working through the welfare issues identified in order to focus in on the highest priority. Throughout the process experts were given the opportunity to add in welfare issues which had not been raised in the first set of interviews. This led to a total of 62 issues being identified and considered by the experts.

LIST OF EXPERTS:

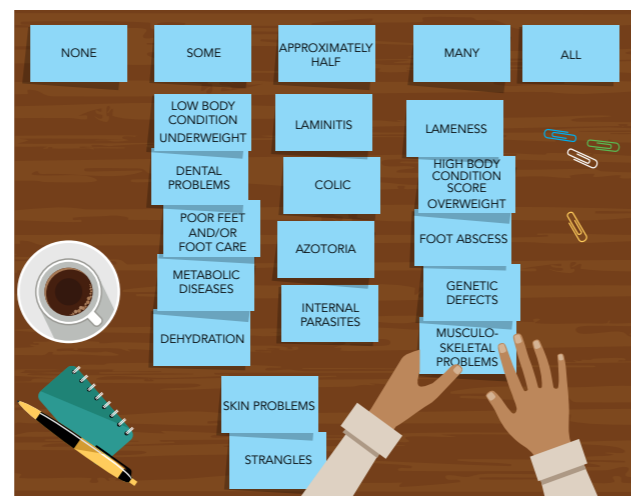
-
- RSPCA (UK based animal welfare charity)
Chief Inspector
-
- Trading Standards officer for a local authority
-
- UK based equine charity representatives x 2
-
- Senior government veterinary officer
-
- RSPCA expert witness
-
- British Equestrian Federation official
-
- The Showing Council representative
-
- Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI) vet
-
- British Horseracing Authority representative
-
- The Thoroughbred Breeders Association representative
-
- Fellow of the British Horse Society
-
- Representative of the Association of British Riding Schools
-
- Equestrian magazine representatives x 2
-
- Horse abattoir proprietor
-
- Business manager for a large group of equine vets
-
- British equestrian insurance company representative
-
- Horse training and equine behaviour practitioner
-
- Horse dealer

ROUND 1:

A prioritisation exercise was carried out with each expert individually. The exercise was designed to encourage objective, independent thinking around the 52 previously identified welfare issues. To make it easier the task was broken down into four sections based on the four categories of welfare issues: health, management, riding and training, and broader contexts. The experts were first asked to categorise each of the welfare issues based on their perceptions of the **severity and duration of suffering caused**. Then the experts were asked to categorise the welfare issues according to their best estimate of the number of horses affected.



An example of the management-related issues categorised by an expert based on their perceptions of the severity and duration of suffering caused.



An example of the health-related issues categorised according to an expert's estimate of the number of animals affected.

ROUND 2:

The experts individually completed a second prioritisation exercise via a PowerPoint presentation. Using the results from round one as a starting point the experts were asked to categorise welfare issues as either **high priority issues, important but non priority issues or low priority issues**. The welfare issues they were asked to consider were the 52 issues that arose during the interviews as well as 10 additional issues that the 20 experts raised during Round 1.



The starting point of the exercise showed the welfare issues ranked in order of importance based on the findings of the first round.

The experts sorted the issues to identify their 10 top priority issues, additional high priority issues, important but non priority issues, and low priority issues, considering the results of Round 1.

ROUND 3:

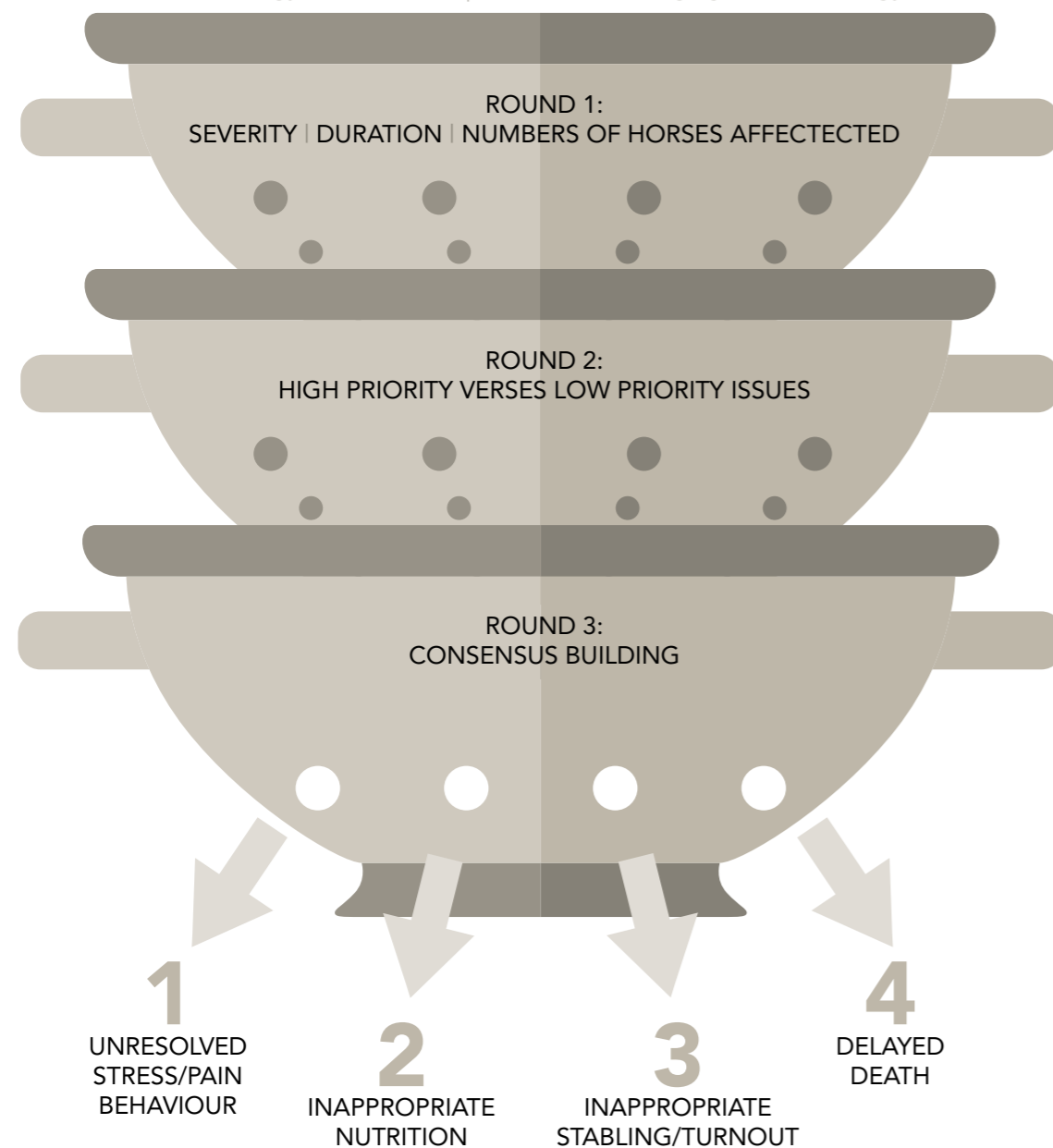
To consolidate the findings from the first two rounds and identify the most important welfare issues facing horses in England and Wales a facilitated workshop was held with 12 of the 20 experts. The focus of the workshop was **consensus building** to identify the welfare priorities based on a group-level understanding of the issues.



RESULTS

The 62 welfare issues were 'sieved' over the three rounds and 4 welfare priorities emerged:

Underweight | Poor feet/foot care | Overweight | Internal parasites | Laminitis | Dental problems | Skin problems | Lameness | Metabolic diseases | Musculoskeletal problems | Strangles | Genetic defects | Foot abscess | Colic (abdominal pain) | Dehydration | Azoturia | Underfeeding | Inappropriate rugging | Lack of water | Over-feeding | Social Isolation | Incorrect feeding | Tethering | Inappropriate worming | Not vaccinated | Over-clipping | Overstocking | Fly grazing | Inappropriate use of training aids (e.g.whips and spurs) | Poorly fitting tack | Breaking in / ridden too young | Rollkur | Over biting | Lack of clear aids | Heavy handed riding | Unbalanced riders | Over working | Not warming horses up / cooling them down properly | Rapping | Horses kept in unsuitable environments | Inappropriate 'use' | Where behaviour is misunderstood | Abandonment | Transportation | Where horses don't match expectations | Where euthanasia is delayed | Horse / rider / owner incompatible | Where people own too many horses for their resources | Inappropriate routine | Work/exercise unvaried | Restricted turnout | Gastric ulcers | Neurophysiological problems | Respiratory disease | Inappropriate veterinary treatment | Training based on flooding¹ | Unsuitable/unsafe work surfaces | Horses worked beyond their level of development | Stabling horses 24 hours a day without exercise | Stabling horses 24 hours a day with exercise | Any horse changing owners/movingyards | Lowvalue/problemhorsechangingowners/movingyards.



KEY POINTS

Through the consultation process a large number of issues emerged as being potentially important causes of welfare concern. However, the experts agreed on 4 issues which they considered to be the highest priority when taking in to account both the severity and duration of suffering caused to individual horses and the total number of horses affected. These consistently came out as important, high priority welfare issues across all three rounds of the consultation.

The welfare priorities identified were:

- 1) unresolved stress/pain behaviour
- 2) inappropriate nutrition
- 3) inappropriate stabling/turnout
- 4) delayed death

Rather than being welfare issues per se, the 4 identified priorities represent risk factors that were perceived to challenge equine welfare in England and Wales. As such they are referred to as the **4 priority welfare challenges** in the rest of this report.

(Footnote to diagram opposite)

¹ Flooding is a training technique whereby horses are exposed to a stimulus that they are fearful of, at a high intensity level, without means of escape, until the behavioural response to the stimuli diminishes.

In order to tackle welfare compromises caused by these 4 priority welfare challenges a greater awareness of the underlying causes of each one and the specific welfare consequences associated with them was seen to be important. Chapter 4 draws on insight gained from both the interviews and expert consultation to explore the 4 priority welfare challenges in greater depth.

CHAPTER 4 Focusing in on the 4 priority challenges to equine welfare



PURPOSE

We analysed how stakeholders talked about the priority welfare challenges to give insight into how they defined them and their perceptions of the possible causes. When considered in the context of wider knowledge of these challenges, for example the scientific literature where available, this information may be used to suggest effective routes to improvement.

METHODS

Qualitative data collected during the in-depth interviews (reported in Chapter 2) and during the consultation process (Chapter 3) were collated and thematic analysis was used to more fully understand the 4 priority challenges and their causes.



KEY FINDINGS

STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS OF THE 4 PRIORITY CHALLENGES TO WELFARE

1. UNRESOLVED STRESS/PAIN BEHAVIOUR

Why does it occur?

Participants perceived that behavioural indicators of stress/pain in the horse are not always accurately recognised by equine caregivers due to a lack of education and because signs are not always easy to detect. Not only may signs of pain/stress go unnoticed they can also be misinterpreted, for example horses exhibiting signs of pain/stress may be thought of as being 'naughty'. It was also felt that indicators of stress/pain are not always acted on appropriately due to lack of recognition, denial, misinterpretation and the perceived cost of veterinary investigation/treatment.

"I just think people need an understanding of horse behaviour. I think that's a key element that is perhaps missing." *(Senior welfare charity worker)*

"I think it's being overlooked because people ... seem reluctant to seek veterinary advice because they fear big vet bills." *(Welfare centre manager)*

Welfare consequences

Behaviour was seen by participants to be a good indicator of welfare. Where stress/pain behaviours are exhibited and not resolved it is likely that the horse will be experiencing ongoing stress/pain and therefore compromised welfare. The welfare compromise may be further compounded in some instances, for example where the horse is punished for exhibiting the behaviour. Problems associated with unresolved stress/pain behaviour were seen to affect large numbers of horses, often for long durations with the severity of suffering caused to individual horses varying.



2. INAPPROPRIATE NUTRITION

Why does it occur?

Participants considered that owners wanted to 'provide' for their horses in the best way possible. However, some owners overfeed or feed inappropriately, perhaps as an expression of love, to prevent boredom in their horse, due to peer pressure, or at suggestions from feed companies. Grazing on unsuitable grass types, for example those grown for dairy cattle, was also seen to contribute to overfeeding. Furthermore, caregivers were thought to have incorrect perceptions of what constitutes a 'healthy' weight for a horse. Obesity was recognised to be a sensitive subject and therefore advice givers, for example vets, were thought by participants to be reluctant to raise the issue with owners. Further to this, there were seen to be practical constraints associated with correct feeding in individual horses, for example owners may not have the resources to restrict grazing and/or exercise their horse more, or owners may feel they need to provide large amounts of concentrate feed to enable the horses to perform.



"... probably the number one for our practice would be trying to stop owners overfeeding their already fat pony ... partly lack of knowledge of horses but also it's their way of loving them ... or it's seen to be the right thing in a livery yard." *(Vet 1)*

Welfare consequences

The participants felt that horses are often fed incorrectly, for example they are fed the wrong types of food or the wrong amounts. The welfare consequences were seen to be broad. Where horses are given limited access to forage it was perceived that their behavioural need to eat for large parts of the day is not met, with both physical and psychological welfare consequences. Overfeeding was seen to be a risk factor for a large number of secondary welfare concerns including laminitis although it was also seen that being overweight per se was not always a welfare problem. Underfeeding was seen to be a more direct immediate welfare problem associated with hunger as a negative state. Overfeeding and obesity were seen to be the main welfare problems associated with nutrition and these problems were thought to affect large numbers of horses, often for a long duration with severity of suffering varying.

"With incorrect feeding probably comes that whole thing about the environment, as in if the horse is out grazing it will not only be getting correct feeding, but also having all the other environmental associated benefits ..."
(Equine charity representative)

"... of themselves [overfeeding and high body condition score] per se do not cause suffering, but because they increase the risk of secondary problems like metabolic syndrome, like laminitis ... I think they are pathways to suffering rather than suffering themselves."
(RSPCA expert witness)

3. INAPPROPRIATE STABLING/TURNOUT

Why does it occur?

Culture, tradition, peer norms, human psychology, practicalities and constraints on resources were all seen by participants to be reasons why horses may be stabled/turned out inappropriately. For example, stabling of horses for long periods of time was linked to cultural norms, climate and the human desire to 'tuck horses up'.

"....I've only got 3 acres ... I very heavily grazed it last year and so the grass is very, very short there. If I turned my horses out now they would gallop round once, completely cut it up for the summer and I'd have no grass."
(Showjumping trainer)

Welfare consequences

The participants felt that the welfare of horses may be compromised when the amount of time spent at pasture/stabled does not meet their individual needs, where they are kept in social isolation or when they are exposed to inappropriate grazing conditions. Welfare problems associated with inappropriate stabling/turnout were seen to affect large numbers of horses for a long duration with severity of suffering varying.

It should be noted that the stakeholders had diverse views in relation to this issue and there was no universal consensus over what 'best practice' was.

"....you can't lock a horse up [24 hours a day], that's not natural for it and it would be thoroughly miserable."
(Showjumping trainer)

"Some horses come over from Europe, you can't turn them out because they've never been turned out. Some horses cope [with constant stabling]."
(Equestrian insurance company representative)



4. DELAYED DEATH



Why does it occur?

Human psychological factors including emotional attachment, peer pressure and negative attitudes to killing were seen by participants as some of the key reasons for delaying the death of a horse. Vets were seen to not always give appropriate guidance to horse owners regarding the best time to put horses down. Reluctance to put down horses who were at risk of future suffering was seen to have additional causes. In particular, financial factors were thought to play a role as some horses have no slaughter value due to passport regulations. However, owners may perceive the horse as having some financial value if sold and consequently choose this option. For some, the actual cost of killing and disposing of horses via any method was seen to factor into decision making.

"...people don't want to say good bye to them..." *(Vet 1)*

"We have cases where people can't afford to have them put down." *(Knackerman)*

"People see them as being worth £500 to sell. If they're worth 300 quid to put down [sold to slaughter] and they haven't been able to sell them, their ... decision is to [send it to slaughter]. If they've got to pay to get rid of it [due to passport restrictions on slaughter], they say 'we might keep it, someone might come round the door tomorrow' and then they don't go [to be killed]."
(Horse abattoir proprietor)

"People pass on unrideable, unmanageable horses ..."
(Equestrian magazine representative)

Welfare consequences

Horses may be kept alive inappropriately resulting in firstly, the perpetuation of welfare problems, for example continued suffering of a horse in pain. This was seen to affect relatively large numbers of horses, for short periods of time with severity of suffering often being severe. Secondly, an increased risk of suffering, for example where horses are unwanted by their owners, become low value and subsequently aren't cared for well. This was seen to affect large numbers of horses, often for a long duration with severity of suffering varying.

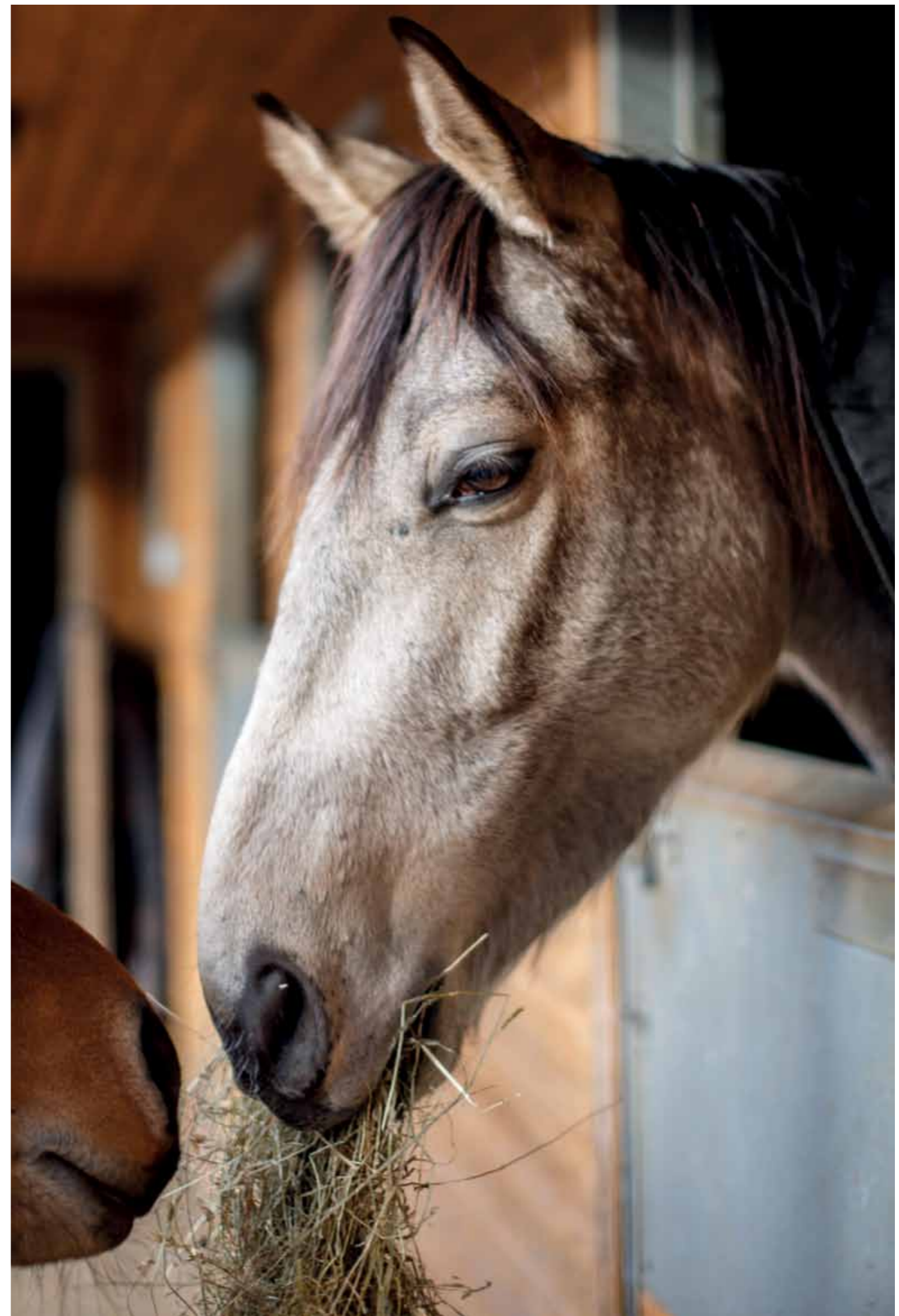
"So, at the end of [the horses'] life ... we back off from making the decision that's in the best interest of the horse ... I think neglect is becoming more common and I think that's partly driven by sentimentality and the unwillingness to make the final decisions about horses."
(RSPCA expert witness)

"For a lot of horses they are better being put down than to be pushed from pillar to post."
(Field officer 1)

SUMMARY

The priority welfare challenges facing horses in England and Wales, their causes and their consequences were discussed by the research participants offering valuable insight as an essential step in tackling these problems.

It will be important to continually monitor the welfare status of horses in England and Wales both at an individual and population level as a means of evaluating interventions and identifying any emerging welfare priorities. Chapter 5 describes the views of 26 focus group participants about approaches to welfare assessment.



CHAPTER 5 Stakeholder perceptions of approaches to welfare assessment



PURPOSE

Monitoring the welfare of horses, for example through formal welfare assessment, should be an integrated part of welfare improvement strategies. Welfare assessment should be utilised to evaluate any welfare interventions implemented at a population or individual horse level, and allows for emerging welfare problems to be identified and addressed. Despite its value, formal welfare assessment of the equine population is currently limited. Stakeholder perceptions of, and attitudes towards, welfare assessment may offer insight into the reasons behind this limited use. It will be important to understand these attitudes as they should inform future development and implementation of assessment approaches which are likely to improve equine welfare.



METHODS

Focus group discussions were carried out with six separate stakeholder groups: Vets, leisure horse owners, grooms, professional riders, welfare charity workers and welfare scientists. A total of 26 stakeholders took part in discussions and were asked:



1: What should be assessed to get a picture of an individual horse's welfare?

2: How should we go about making these assessments?

FINDINGS:

- Welfare assessment was viewed as a means of measuring poor welfare and there was only limited discussion of welfare assessment as a means of encouraging good practice:

“...people are going to have a perception that you are there to find things wrong.” *(Groom)*

“I suppose you could have encouragement of, for example, you could say, this yard is [named facilitator] approved, sort of thing ... you create a sort of idea and a sort of package, that people could openly sign themselves up to and say look, I meet this standard. I’m amazing. Come to my yard.” *(Leisure horse owner)*

- The need to assess welfare across the whole population of horses was not recognised. As one focus group participant stated:

“There would be no point in doing it.” *(Professional rider)*

- Participants felt that welfare should be assessed over time as it does not remain constant. For example, they believed that seasonality should be considered when assessing welfare:

“I’d say [welfare and welfare assessment is] seasonal isn’t it? Going into winter, coming out of winter, half way through summer, potentially. That kind of thing.” *(Leisure horse owner)*

- Participants also saw that there is a need to understand the context surrounding any given measure and that this is only possible through longitudinal enquiry. It was seen that the owner of a horse could give valuable information about the longitudinal context:

“If somebody complained about the same horse and I have the owner standing there with me and I say, ‘Why’s it underweight?’ and she’s got a reason for it. I don’t know - it’s been in the vets for six weeks because it’s had a major colic operation. ‘It’s the first time it’s out; we’re just building it up again.’ Then that’s not a welfare situation, is it? There’s a reason behind it.” *(Welfare charity worker)*

- An experienced and knowledgeable assessor was seen as critical and stakeholders felt confident in their own ability to assess welfare:

“...somebody comes in and gives two up [implies using the whip on the horse], you go into- and the horse behaves like a hooligan, slams the anchors on and you know it’s being naughty and give it two up, is that abuse? No, not in that context...” *(Professional rider)*

Another participant replies “I think I could recognise the difference.” *(Professional rider)*



KEY POINTS

Equine stakeholders currently have a largely negative perception of welfare assessment and felt there to be widespread defensive attitudes towards ‘outside’ assessment. However, the stakeholders consulted were confident in their own abilities to assess the welfare of horses under their care. It was seen as important that welfare assessment considered how welfare varied over time and the context surrounding any instances of potential poor welfare. In the future it will be essential to consider these perceptions if welfare assessment is used to drive improvements in equine welfare in England and Wales.

The research presented in chapters 2-5 provides a basis for understanding the welfare challenges faced by horses in England and Wales and some of the barriers to welfare improvement. Chapter 6 discusses the next steps in tackling the priority welfare challenges outlined in Chapter 4 and makes recommendations for improving the welfare of horses in England and Wales.

CHAPTER 6 Future directions to improve equine welfare in England and Wales

Bringing together the perceptions of 77 people associated with horses in England and Wales has provided an overview of horse welfare, from the day-to-day concerns of equine caregivers to identifying 4 overarching priority challenges to equine welfare. This research has also identified potential routes to equine welfare improvement, addressing both the priority challenges, and a wider set of industry and horse based needs.

SOLUTIONS TO THE PRIORITY WELFARE CHALLENGES, AS IDENTIFIED BY THE EXPERTS

As part of the consultation process described in chapter 4, experts were encouraged, during the final workshop, to discuss possible solutions to the priority welfare challenges they had identified.

UNRESOLVED STRESS/PAIN BEHAVIOUR

The expert group felt that more academic research was needed to fully understand the links between behaviour, stress and pain and to develop objective measures of stress and pain in horses. Vets, riding instructors, the Pony Club, riding clubs and the equine press were all identified as having a role in educating horse caregivers about indicators of stress and pain and appropriate responses to these indicators. Academics and experts were also seen to have a role in tackling this issue through evaluating the effectiveness of intervention programmes.

INAPPROPRIATE NUTRITION

The experts identified vets as having a key role in tackling the problems associated with inappropriate nutrition. The group felt that in particular a harmonised approach by all vets was needed, otherwise horse owners would preferentially choose vets that didn't challenge them about their horses' nutrition. Feed companies were also seen to play an important role in tackling this issue, although many experts felt that feed companies already offer appropriate nutrition for a range of horses and exercise situations. Better owner education, based on existing good research, was seen as a requirement to ensure the right nutritional choices were made for individual horses.

INAPPROPRIATE STABLING/TURNOUT

The experts recognised that although all horse owners make choices relating to the amount and type of stabling and turnout experienced by their horses, livery yard owners could play a particular role in addressing this issue. For example livery owners have a role in the promotion of alternative approaches to management, including group housing and the use of all-weather turnout facilities.

Strengthening legislation was seen as another possible route to improvement but it was emphasised that a 'one size fits all' approach would be inappropriate. For example, it was felt by some experts that, for some horses, turn out to pasture may not always be appropriate.

DELAYED DEATH

Some experts felt that one route to improvement would be via pressure on the EU to make changes to the passport regulations. In particular, some of the experts promoted legislation changes that would enable horses who had received medications, including Phenylbutazone, to be slaughtered to enter the human food chain after a six month withdrawal period. In addition, challenging negative attitudes of horse owners towards timely euthanasia was seen to be important.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are aimed at those with a role in promoting equine welfare, including equine charities, industry governing bodies, research funders and veterinary surgeons. The recommendations are based on three years of research into equine welfare challenges in England and Wales and cover both strategic approaches to welfare improvement as well as methods to facilitate effective communication about equine welfare with people who own or care for horses.

A. RECOMMENDATIONS ON STRATEGIC APPROACHES TO EQUINE WELFARE IMPROVEMENT

A1. Focusing together on the 4 welfare priorities

The equine industry must work together to respond to the 4 priority challenges to equine welfare in England and Wales that were identified during the study. These are:

- 1) UNRESOLVED STRESS/PAIN BEHAVIOUR
- 2) INAPPROPRIATE NUTRITION
- 3) INAPPROPRIATE STABLING/TURNOUT
- 4) DELAYED DEATH

We recommend that, in light of limitations on resources, equine welfare charities, governing bodies of equine sports, research funders and the wider equine industry focus their attention on these 4 priority welfare challenges.

Our research participants called for further research in some specific areas, for example in relation to unresolved stress/pain behaviour.

There is much to learn about the identified priority welfare challenges in relation to the welfare compromise they pose and the routes to resolving these.

We recommend that the equine industry does not lose sight of the fact that a further 58 separate welfare issues were identified in this study. These further challenges must not be ignored when working towards optimising equine welfare in England and Wales.



A2. Amending legislation and updating Codes of Practice

Changes to equine passport legislation were advocated by the industry experts as a way of preventing unwanted horses becoming neglected resulting in a poor welfare state.

We recommend that industry leaders, including welfare charities, lobby the Government to seek amendments to the existing EU passport legislation to allow horses that are currently banned from entering the human food chain, due to treatment with certain prohibited substances, to be slaughtered for human consumption after a suitable withdrawal period.

Welfare legislation, supported by Codes of Practice, are important routes to welfare improvement but this relies upon a greater level of compliance not only with existing welfare legislation but with statutory Codes of Practice made under the Animal Welfare Act of 2006.

We recommend that leaders in the equine industry, including the equine welfare charities, actively promote the Codes of Practice and government guidance relating to equine welfare among those who own and care for horses. We also recommend that industry leaders lobby Government to ensure that the Codes of Practice are maintained and regularly updated in the light of new information.

A3. Developing welfare assessment protocols for use by horse owners

Welfare assessment is the first step to improving animal welfare and research has shown that animal owners who regularly monitor aspects of animal welfare are more likely to try to improve welfare. Furthermore, welfare assessment can facilitate decisions on euthanasia to prevent prolonged suffering due to euthanasia delay. As such, welfare assessments should be conducted regularly by people who own or care for horses, considering both the physical and mental welfare of the animal.

One disadvantage of self-assessment is that some individuals may be unable to identify certain welfare problems due to lack of experience in recognising them. However, this may be overcome by providing specific guidance from a range of sources, including veterinary surgeons, the British Equine Veterinary Association (BEVA) and welfare charities, to support persons responsible in assessing the welfare of their horses.

There has already been some investment in developing equine welfare assessment protocols and there are now resources which could be readily adapted for use by people who own or care for horses.

We recommend that equine welfare charities, with the support of veterinary surgeons, BEVA and academics, now develop and promote appropriate welfare assessment protocols to be used by horse owners.

Our recommended strategic approaches to equine welfare improvement represent ways in which those with a role in promoting equine welfare at an industry level can work towards equine welfare improvement. Ultimately, however, the responsibility for equine welfare lies with horse owners under the Animal Welfare Act (2006), supported by others that provide primary care for horses.

The specific recommendations below focus on the communication between those with leadership roles in equine welfare improvement and those who own and care for horses.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMUNICATION ABOUT EQUINE WELFARE WITH PEOPLE WHO OWN OR CARE FOR HORSES

B1. Communicating about welfare

We found that the language used about 'welfare' impacts on perceptions of welfare. Organisations and individuals communicating about welfare with people who own or care for horses must consider the language they use in their communications.

We recommend that all those who communicate about welfare issues with those who own or care for horses should use positive, non-threatening and clearly understood language to prevent defensive and negative attitudes in response to the messages being communicated.

B2. Identifying suitable sources of advice

Our research found that horse owners may not always seek and receive advice relating to welfare from the best sources. One way to overcome this is to clearly signpost horse owners to people and organisations who are competent and trained to give advice about welfare. There is a role for equine welfare charities, BEVA and veterinary surgeons to provide clear guidance about who is 'qualified' to offer advice and support in specific areas of equine health and welfare.

We recommend that welfare charities in particular provide such guidance to those who own and care for horses about where to find appropriate high quality advice when the horses in their care are exhibiting behaviours that might be indicative of stress/pain. We recommend one sensible starting point at a time of crisis is with the carer's own veterinary surgeon.



B3. Ensuring up-to-date advice

Our research has highlighted that the 'right' advice, based on current research, may not be reaching the people who own or care for horses. It is critical that these individuals know who to approach. It is equally important that those who are responsible for providing advice, including veterinary surgeons, welfare charities, trainers and other paraprofessionals, ensure that their recommendations are founded on the most up to date scientific and practical knowledge.

We recommend that individuals and organisations responsible for providing advice to people who own or care for horses must ensure that the information they provide is correct, based on the most up-to-date knowledge and has no commercial bias.

B4. Developing practical solutions

Our research participants often discussed practical constraints that act as a barrier to optimising the welfare of the horses in their care. For example, the climate in England and Wales was seen to make all-year round pasture access for horses problematic as pasture often becomes poached.

We recommend that individual horse owners, yard owners/managers and the wider equine industry should work together to develop and share solutions to practical husbandry and management problems to ensure optimal welfare is maintained at all times.

B5. Encouraging owners

Even where there is a substantial amount of scientific knowledge about particular welfare problems to support specific interventions, such as for nutrition-related welfare challenges, there remains insufficient evidence about how best to support and encourage owners to make the necessary changes to improve equine welfare. Work aimed at improving farm and companion animal welfare has developed proven methods to change owner behaviour that can be applied to equines. For example, helping farmers to identify and reduce the barriers to making changes on their farms has been successful at reducing lameness in dairy cows.

We recommend those working to improve equine welfare, especially equine charities and veterinary surgeons, utilise existing knowledge about how best to stimulate humans to change their behaviour to benefit animals.



A digital version of this report is available from
www.worldhorsewelfare.org/survey-equine-welfare-england-and-wales

