



**Advancing Equine Scientific Excellence**

**Quality of Life Virtual Case Study**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**



in partnership with



September 2021



## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

From November 2020 to April 2021, Advancing Equine Scientific Excellence (AESE) coordinated the Quality of Life (QoL) virtual case study (VCS), in order to understand perceptions of equine quality of life and how it can be effectively measured in a variety of situations. The project was run by World Horse Welfare in partnership with The Horse Trust.

The students of today are the owners and carers of Equidae of tomorrow and will have their own experience of how quality of life can be measured through an animal's lifetime. This case study provided an opportunity for educational institutions to take part in a national scale project, and to influence the development of the measurement of quality of life by both World Horse Welfare and The Horse Trust.

Through the case study information pack, institutions were provided with the background to the project as well as a list of key sources of information. A series of questions formed the basis of the case study, with students asked to concentrate on one of the areas highlighted.

Key findings from the case study include:

- Quality of life should be considered on a continuum, and should include assessment of both positive and poor QoL during all life stages, as well as informal and formal assessment;
- The usability and accessibility of QoL assessment tools and frameworks should be assessed during development;
- Collaborative working, ensuring any developments in QoL assessment mechanisms are mutually supportive between researchers and end users, is of vital importance; and
- Future development in QoL tools and frameworks should take into account the full range of technology available, including image capturing systems, as well as providing owners with suggestions as to what they could do to improve the situation if the animal's QoL is suboptimal.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

AESE would like to acknowledge the many people who participated in this case study: those who gave of their time providing information that was utilised in the study; students, lecturers and institutions who compiled responses to the case study questions and presented their findings; the panellists for Round 1 and the Final Round; and those who provided help in other ways. Without their hard work the QoL virtual case study would not have taken place. We would particularly like to thank the project team, listed below, for their contribution.

## **PROJECT TEAM**

**World Horse Welfare:** Alana Chapman, Sam Chubbock, Janet Douglas

**The Horse Trust:** Liane Preshaw, Jan Rogers, Ellie Taylor

**Advancing Equine Scientific Excellence:** Georgina Crossman, Pat Harris

**Round 1 Panel:** Pat Harris (Chair – Waltham Petcare Science Institute), Sam Chubbock (World Horse Welfare), Janet Douglas (World Horse Welfare), Jan Rogers (The Horse Trust)

**Final Round Panel:** Roly Owers (Chair – World Horse Welfare), Liane Preshaw (The Horse Trust), Karen Rickards (The Donkey Sanctuary), Sam York (Oakring Stud and Performance Horses)

**Institution:** Lecturer(s); Researchers (students)

**Hartpury University:** Nicola Hewer, Ellie Thorogood; Iona Robinson, Isabelle Underwood

**University Centre Askham Bryan:** Loni Loftus; Charlotte Douglas, Amy Gough, Paloma Osbourne

**University Centre Sparsholt:** Lorna Cameron, Cameo Knight; Laura Bridle, Emily Davenport, Sophie Harriman, Helena Shorney, Jo Southey

## **REPORT CIRCULATION AND USAGE**

This executive summary, focusing on the recommendations from the full report, will be distributed to World Horse Welfare, The Horse Trust and Advancing Equine Scientific Excellence (AESE) stakeholders, along with institutions who participated in the QoL virtual case study (see acknowledgements above). It will also be made available on the World Horse Welfare website.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following table summarises the key findings from the Quality of Life virtual case study, in the form of recommendations, and considers their current status alongside comments from World Horse Welfare and The Horse Trust.

Table 1: QoL VCS recommendations

<b>Sec</b>	<b>Key finding suggested from the QoL VCS</b>	<b>Comments from World Horse Welfare and The Horse Trust</b>
2.1	<p>The quality of life continuum</p> <p><i>Note: the quality of life continuum, including both positive and negative QoL during all stages of life, as well as informal and formal assessment, should be carefully considered</i></p>	<p>The case study emphasised the need to assess both positive and negative experiences. Historically, the focus has been on identifying negative experiences but at best this will result in neutral welfare. For horses to experience a good QoL, from their perspective, it is essential that we provide them with the opportunity to have positive experiences.</p> <p>The case study also reinforced the importance of measuring QoL throughout life. Any assessment tool aimed at horse owners must support them at all stages of their horse’s life, not just when making end of life decisions.</p>
2.2	<p>Accessibility of quality of life assessment tools and frameworks</p> <p><i>Note: the usability of the assessment mechanisms is key to their successful adoption and ongoing utilisation</i></p>	<p>The case study highlighted significant disparity between what researchers consider feasible to measure under real-life conditions and what horse owners either currently do or feel able to do/incorporate. This is key as any QoL tool aimed at horse owners must be feasible for use by them in real-world situations. The outcomes of this case study support the</p>

		<p>findings of recent research that explored how feasible end users consider existing QoL tools to be.</p> <p>We either need to look at developing a tool that strikes a balance between ease of use and validity for all people who care for horses or alternatively, we select a subgroup of owners/keepers within the population where we can demonstrate that the introduction of a tool would make a substantial difference to horse wellbeing.</p>
2.3	<p>Collaborative working</p> <p><i>Note: it is important to ensure that any developments in QoL assessment mechanisms are mutually supportive for both researchers and end users</i></p>	<p>As above, we need to ensure we collaborate with owners/end users as well as colleagues within the international research and welfare sectors. The end-user collaboration has not always been carefully considered at an early stage and the engagement of user groups early in the development of a tool will be pivotal to its uptake.</p>
2.4	<p>Future developments in quality of life tools and frameworks</p> <p><i>Note: any developments should take into account the full range of technology available, as well as providing owners with suggestions as to what they could do to improve the situation if the animal's QoL is suboptimal</i></p>	<p>The case study presentations provided inspiration for next steps and what to consider when developing a tool for horse owners which would preferably be digital and mobile.</p> <p>The case study also highlighted how few positive indicators of QoL are included in existing tools. To truly assess a horse's QoL, it is essential that future tools include valid measures of positive affective (emotional) states.</p>



