

Animal Welfare Policy

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Animal Welfare Policy

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1. Purpose

This policy sets out the Western Equestrian Society's (WES) unwavering commitment to safeguarding the physical and psychological welfare of horses involved in our activities. It defines the standards of care, conduct, and accountability expected of all members and participants, and outlines how concerns will be addressed.

WES recognises that public trust in equestrian sport depends on prioritising animal welfare, not only in law but in spirit. This policy is part of our commitment to responsible horsemanship and to protecting the social licence under which the sport operates.

2. Scope

This policy applies to:

- All horses used in WES-affiliated activities, including shows, clinics, camps, demos, and training days

- All WES members, participants, officials, judges, clinicians, and spectators
- All environments where horses are handled, ridden, stabled, or transported as part of WES activity

It applies **before, during, and after** any WES activity where a horse is present.

3. Definitions

- **Animal welfare:** A horse's physical health, mental wellbeing, and ability to express natural behaviours free from suffering or distress
- **Social licence:** Public acceptance of horse sport based on trust, transparency, and ethical treatment of animals
- **Misuse:** Any treatment of a horse that is negligent, excessive, harmful, or contrary to good practice
- **Welfare Concern:** Any report of behaviour, equipment, conditions, or conduct that may compromise a horse's wellbeing
- **Welfare Officer:** The named individual responsible for receiving, assessing, and escalating animal welfare concerns

4. Policy Statement

WES believes that the horse's welfare must come **before competition, convenience, or personal achievement**. No activity will take place under the WES name where horses are at risk due to ignorance, neglect, or pressure to perform.

Every person interacting with horses under WES must demonstrate respect, care, and knowledge. Where standards fall short — intentionally or otherwise — the Society will act.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

| Role | Responsibility |
|------------------|---|
| Welfare Officer | Acts as primary contact for welfare concerns; leads policy implementation |
| Show/Event Leads | Ensure venues, surfaces, conditions, and protocols support horse welfare |
| Judges/Officials | Monitor behaviour, tack, and presentation; intervene where welfare is at risk |

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| All Members | Responsible for the horses in their care and for raising any concerns |
| Trainers/Clinicians | Must act within ethical guidelines and prioritise the horse at all times |

6. Policy Detail / Procedures

6.1 Core Principles

WES adopts the BEF's **Five Domains of Welfare** approach, ensuring horses are:

- **Properly fed and hydrated**
- **Housed in safe and comfortable conditions**
- **Healthy and free from pain or injury**
- **Able to exhibit normal behaviours**
- **Experiencing a positive mental state**

The horse's welfare is the responsibility of the **owner, rider, and handler**, and must never be compromised due to lack of preparation, over-ambition, or misjudged training.

6.2 Expectations of Participants

- Horses presented at WES events must be **fit, sound, and suitably trained**
- Any horse showing signs of pain, lameness, distress, or exhaustion may be withdrawn by an official
- Whips, spurs, or training aids must only be used appropriately — never as punishment
- Excessive schooling, visible tension, or forced head carriage may result in intervention or disqualification
- Riders must withdraw their horse if they believe it is lame, distressed, or otherwise unfit to continue
- Horses must never be left tied or transported in a way that puts them at risk

6.3 Show and Event Standards

Event leads must ensure:

- Arenas and warm-up areas are safe, appropriate, and well-managed
- Adequate water and stabling are available where required
- Officials are briefed on welfare duties
- Surfaces are checked for safety and consistency
- Scheduled breaks are provided to reduce pressure on horses and riders

Judges, stewards, and scribes must:

- Observe riders in warm-up and report any concerns
- Check tack and equipment where warranted
- Halt or disqualify competitors where serious welfare concerns arise

6.4 Reporting a Welfare Concern

Any person may raise a concern, either during or after a WES activity.

Reports should go to the **Welfare Officer** or **Show/Event Lead**, and may be:

- Verbal (during event)
- Written (after event, via concern form or email)
- Anonymous (although less preferable for follow-up)

The Welfare Officer will:

- Log the concern
- Assess the immediacy and severity
- Investigate, gather evidence, and speak with involved parties
- Determine appropriate outcome (see section 6.5)

Serious or repeated breaches may be referred to the Disciplinary Procedure.

6.5 Outcomes and Actions

Depending on the concern, outcomes may include:

| Level | Outcome |
|---------------------|--|
| Informal | Guidance or advice issued; monitored in future |
| Formal Warning | Issued by Council or Event Lead for serious first breach |
| Removal from Class | Rider disqualified or asked to withdraw at judge's discretion |
| Investigation | Full review by Welfare Officer and report to Secretary/Council |
| Suspension/Referral | Temporary ban or escalation via Disciplinary Procedure |

WES reserves the right to **suspend participation** of any individual pending investigation.

6.6 Veterinary Involvement

Where available, a vet may be present or on-call at major events.

In their absence, experienced judges or clinicians may assess horses for soundness.

WES officials are empowered to act in the best interest of the horse, even if this overrules a rider's preference.

6.7 Public Scrutiny and Social Licence

WES recognises the equestrian world is under increased public scrutiny following high-profile welfare failures. We:

- Expect riders to model ethical horsemanship
- Will act against practices that harm our public credibility
- Encourage filming, transparency, and open conversation
- Welcome feedback from members, spectators, and partner bodies

The **burden of proof is on us** to show that horses in our care are respected, safe, and well-treated.

7. Related Policies and References

- Disciplinary Procedure
- Safeguarding Policy (Youth & Vulnerable Adults)
- Code of Conduct
- BEF Equine Welfare Guidelines
- BHS Charter for the Horse
- WES Rule Book (for competition conduct)
- Welfare Concern Reporting Form (Templates and Tools)

8. Compliance and Breach Handling

Any breach of this policy — whether deliberate or negligent — will be taken seriously. WES may:

- Intervene at the event
- Initiate formal investigation
- Refer to external welfare or legal authorities
- Suspend membership or role involvement

We will always prioritise the horse's welfare — even where it causes inconvenience or challenge.

9. Review and Version Control

| Version | Date | Author | Changes Made |
|---------|------------|--------|--------------------------------|
| 0.1 | 23/07/2025 | DG | Initial policy draft |
| 0.5 | 08/10/2025 | DG | Updated post Chairman's review |

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| 1.0 | 04/11/2025 | DG | Updated following approval from Welfare Officer |
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10. Approval Record

| Approved By | Date | Notes |
|--------------|------------|-----------------------------|
| Full Council | 04/11/2025 | Approved for implementation |