
Equine Welfare Policy

The Pony Club is committed to the Health and well-being (Welfare) of all horses and ponies taking part in our activities through good horsemanship training at all levels - this is the ethos of the Pony Club.

This policy details this commitment and how it is embedded through the provision of education, training, sports, and competitions on offer to members.

The policy applies to all who are accompanying equines to Pony Club activities and should be adhered to.

Public acceptance ('social licence to operate'.)

Like many sports, activities, and industries, equestrianism will only be able to flourish if it retains the acceptance of the general public. Activities that are accepted are said to have a 'social licence to operate'. There is growing concern, both within the equestrian world and outside it, about the use and potential abuse of horses, ponies, and donkeys. This concern threatens our sport. All within The Pony Club must respect this reality and show that they always take their responsibility for the welfare and care of their animals seriously. Fundamental to this is an understanding of animals, their behavioural traits, and their comforts and discomforts, as well as the points of view of non-horse-users in society.

Our welfare responsibilities

The Pony Club demonstrates its commitment to equine welfare through the provision of General and Sporting Rules which must be adhered to. These include:

- Horses and ponies taking part in activities and competitions must be over 4 years of age on the day of the event. The age of the horse or pony will be marked on the Passport.
- All horses and ponies should be properly groomed and turned out, with correctly fitting tack/clothing.
- Horses and ponies who are infirm through old age, low-fat score, illness, or lameness are not able to take part in Pony Club activities.
- Horses and ponies which are felt to be a danger to their rider/handler, other horses, or members should not attend.
- Pregnant mares are not to be ridden at events unless accompanied by a veterinary certificate. Heavily pregnant mares, mares in milk and those with foals at foot are not acceptable at Pony Club activities.
- Stallions may be ridden if written permission is provided by the District Commissioner/Centre Proprietor. Stallions should be clearly identified by the wearing of a Stallion Disc.

However, our duty of care to horses and ponies extends much further than these rules. Everyone involved with The Pony Club understands what constitutes good

welfare and realises that it is much more than just ensuring that an animal is physically healthy.

The basic tenets of good welfare are enshrined in the [Animal Welfare Act 2006](#). This act legislates that every owner or person has a duty of care to ensure and support the well-being of the animals for which they are responsible. It is an offence to cause suffering or ill-treatment. This also extends to mistreatment, neglect or abuse that occurs because of failure to take adequate measures to protect animals.

Through education, rallies and competitive opportunities members and their families will learn to exceed the care standards identified in the Animal Welfare Act 2006 whilst also being able to promote positive welfare concepts.

The requirements in the Animal Welfare Act 2006 are largely based on a concept known as the 'Five Freedoms'. These freedoms underlie most good welfare practices. The Pony Club is committed to ensuring that all animals are afforded them. This ensures that the animals' physical and mental needs are met.

The Five Freedoms are:

1. Freedom from hunger/thirst
2. Freedom from pain, injury and disease
3. Freedom to show natural behaviour
4. Freedom from discomfort
5. Freedom from fear and distress.

More recently, the Five Freedoms have been expanded into a concept known as the Five Domains. The main difference between the Five Freedoms and the Five Domains is that the Five Domains considers the effects of our management on animals' mental state (i.e., how 'happy' they are). It also encourages us to think about providing positive experiences, rather than just avoiding negative experiences).

This document summarises the Pony Club's approach to the Five Freedoms. However, the Five Domain's concepts of 'happiness' and positive experiences should also be always borne in mind.

Freedom from Hunger and Thirst

To support all Equines taking part in Pony Club activities, whether that be competitions, training, or fun activities, they will be provided with access to:

- Freshwater is provided by the venue by way of water drinkers or troughs, or buckets filled by the owner or member.
- Should there be a concern regarding water availability, an alternative provision will be sought.
- Feed or forage available as appropriate

Feed

Food will be accessible to the Equines in attendance at Pony Club activities at appropriate times, depending on the amount and timing of the exercise that is planned.

Feeding will take place in line with the Manual of Horsemanship guidance to ensure the horse is fed at the correct time before exercise.

Correct feeding and watering are part of the educational provisions made within each branch. Supporting the member to ensure that the Equine in their care has the correct diet and access to water to be physically and mentally healthy.

Freedom from Pain, Injury and Disease

Health Status

The Pony Club supports the education of members and families to practise good horse management and horsemanship. As part of this, no horse or pony showing symptoms of disease, lameness or other significant ailments or pre-existing conditions will take part in activities when doing so might compromise equine welfare. Veterinary advice must be sought if there is any doubt.

Pony Club activities are restricted to equines who are healthy and fit enough to take part. The condition and weight of horses and ponies taking part in activities need to be considered. This includes animals that are too fat, as well as those that are too thin.

Health Status information can be sourced in the Manual of Horsemanship and via [British Equestrian Health Week](#).

Equine Weight

All equines taking part in activities should be monitored using a fat scoring system. (Fat scoring was previously known as 'condition scoring'.) The 0–5 fat scoring system is commonly used in the United Kingdom. To take part in Pony Club activities, horses and ponies should be within a healthy weight and fat score (2.5–3.5) range for their age/height/breed throughout the year.

Additional information can be found on the World Horse Welfare website, the advice on [Weight: is your horse the right weight?](#)

With the support of the District Commissioner/Centre Proprietor/Area Representative/Sports chair, the coach/event organiser can determine if the pony meets these requirements. Veterinary advice must be sought if there is any concern or doubt. If, in the best interest of the horse/ pony taking part, the veterinary advice is to remove the equine, this will be adhered to.

Hoof Care

Farriery and hoof care are paramount to Equine's well-being. To avoid the risk of injury or pain, and to minimise the risk of unsoundness caused by long-term poor foot balance, hoof care and shoeing should be carried out by a registered farrier.

A farrier or check to see if the farrier you are using is on the registered farrier council via: [Find a Farrier](#)

Pony Club activities are to take into consideration if farrier provision is required at the event.

Veterinary Treatment and Microchipping

All owners and responsible persons are encouraged to have a health check of the equine as part of the vaccination process.

Equines that are being treated by a veterinarian are to adhere to the guidance, instruction and limitations set by the veterinarian. This may include not attending a Pony Club activity.

The provision for [equine first aid](#) and treatment is considered part of event planning. Guidance and the [rules](#) of The Pony Club must be adhered to. You can find a registered veterinarian via [Check Veterinary Register](#)

Within activities, Equines can become injured and referrals to veterinary services or treatments may be required. Whilst at Pony Club events a veterinarian will, as a minimum, be on call to support and provide treatment as necessary.

Passports

All horses, ponies and donkeys, with very few exceptions, must have a passport, regardless of whether they travel or not. This is stated in the following regulations:

- England: [The Equine Identification \(England\) Regulations 2018](#)
- Scotland: [The Equine Animal \(Identification\) \(Scotland\) Regulations 2019](#)
- Wales: [The Equine Identification \(Wales\) Regulations 2019](#)
- Northern Ireland: [The Equine Identification Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2019](#)

Passports serve as a record of:

Identification	Ownership	Vaccination
Disease Testing	Control of Medications	Opting out of the food chain

Find out more about equine passports through the [British Equestrian Federation](#).

The equine's passport should be kept with them when travelling and at the yard/stable. The passport will be required for veterinary checks including age, vaccinations and for other purposes.

The microchipping of all horses and ponies became a legal requirement in 2018. Failure to comply could result in a fine. There are numerous benefits of having horses microchipped, including:

- Checking passport details on the National Chip Checker
- Ability to quickly report a horse or pony as missing with the microchip number.
- Check if a horse or pony is being sold legally.

All microchips are registered with a Passport Issuing Organisation (PIO) which is centrally held at the [Central Equine Database](#). For those residing in Scotland, equines can be registered with [ScotEquine](#). This is a Scottish Database that tracks the movement of Equines in Scotland.

Equines without a passport and microchip will not be permitted at Pony Club activities and will be asked to leave the site. Please be aware Fixed Penalties are being introduced during 2023 by the government and enforced by the Local Authorities through attendance at events.

Vaccination

Owners and responsible persons are strongly encouraged to consider the welfare of horses and ponies planning to attend Pony Club activities. As part of these considerations, vaccinations must be considered.

Vaccinations support the development of equine immunity which helps to protect the vaccinated animal from disease. Vaccination also helps to reduce the spread of infectious diseases and therefore protects other animals. All vaccinations must be recorded and signed in the equine's passport by a veterinarian.

The Pony Club has a vaccination rule for attendance at all Pony Club activities. So events are subject to additional rules such as those attending Pony Racing Race Days which are subject to requirements identified by the British Horse Racing Authority. The Pony Club Vaccination rules can be found on the [website](#).

The Pony Club will adhere to the vaccination requirements of any venues being used, such as in the case of racecourses where specific requirements must be met. Those not meeting relevant requirements will be asked to leave the site.

Medication

Equines that are fit and healthy but receiving veterinary treatment with prescription drugs may be allowed to attend Pony Club events since The Pony Club recognises that medications may be required for the ongoing health and welfare of some horses/ponies.

An owner of the equine on prescription medication (including phenylbutazone or pergolide) must inform the event organisers in advance so that proper certification can be provided if deemed necessary.

The event organisers may ban an equine from attending if it is receiving medication (e.g. phenylbutazone or pergolide) or if participation in the event is, in the opinion of the organisers, likely to be detrimental to the equine's health and welfare.

Sports may have specific rules and regulations which are to be followed to take part in the competition. Those found not to be adhering to these rules may be subject to disciplinary action.

The Pony Club protect all equines taking part in its activities and fully supports the British Equestrian Federation's anti-doping programme. Further information

on the programme and controlled medications can be found via British Equestrian [Equine Anti Doping](#).

Equine medications should be used following the instructions of a veterinarian and in the best interest of the equine for which they are prescribed. Welfare is of paramount importance to The Pony Club, and it will fully uphold its rules around the use of equine medications. Please see The Pony Club rules and rules for specific sports [Rulebooks](#).

Event/ Activity planning, Event/ Activity running

The planning of all Pony Club activities should take into consideration the welfare and well-being of all those involved. This includes ensuring that relevant provisions are in place to support continued good health. Please see additional guidance on the Pony Club website under Risk Assessments.

Factors impacting the selection of a venue include the surface, equipment, biosecurity (disease prevention) policy and frequency of competitions. These factors are monitored throughout the activity and are tended to as necessary, ensuring that equine welfare is not put at risk whilst taking part.

When and where appropriate, expert advice and skills should be sought to maintain and monitor risks in the best interests of those taking part.

In the event of injury to or exhaustion of an equine at a Pony Club activity, the member is to dismount, and a veterinarian must check the equine. Equines should be provided with full supportive treatment before being transported.

Where the equine may have sustained serious injury, veterinary attention should be sought immediately before moving the horse.

After further diagnosis and reflection injuries and/or conditions may lead to equines needing to be retired from Pony Club life. Every effort should be made to ensure this is a smooth and healthy transition for the equine. They should be treated humanely and with recognition of the joy they have provided in their life with the Pony Club.

Euthanasia may be required on humane grounds. If an animal's injuries and/or conditions are severe enough that this is a consideration, the situation should be discussed with the owner or responsible person by a veterinarian. If a decision to euthanise is made, the procedure should be carried out by the veterinarian as soon as possible, to minimise the animal's suffering.

Biosecurity

Biosecurity (preventing the spread of infectious disease) forms an important part of event planning for all involved in The Pony Club. Equines can suffer from a variety of viral, bacterial, and fungal infections. Please see the Pony Club biosecurity policy. If any equine is showing signs of infectious disease, veterinary advice is needed. Guidance for Venues can be found in the [British Equestrian Handbook for Venues](#)

Further guidance can be found on the Pony Club website [Veterinary and Horse Welfare page including Biosecurity advice](#)

Tack, Equipment and Rider Aids

Tack and equipment are to be fitted to each horse or pony as an individual. A saddle and bridle are to be fitted by suitable persons who have undertaken appropriate training to consider horse and pony welfare. The condition of the tack/equipment being placed on the horse or pony also needs to be considered.

The type and fit of Bits used for Activities may cause harm, Injury or concern, and considerations to be considered when selecting the correct Bit. If any tack or equipment is found to be causing harm, injury or concern, a Pony Club official will raise this with the committee organising the activity.

Advice for support comfort can be sought via the [Professional Saddle Fitters Association](#) or [The Society of Master Saddlers](#)

Whips and Spurs

The Pony Club does not support the excessive use of rider or handler aids in any situation. Should this be of concern, it should be brought to the attention of the District Commissioner, Centre Proprietor, Official, Sports Chair, Area Representative or Pony Club Office for review.

If worn or carried, these must comply with The Pony Club rules on each item, and they must not be misused (as specified in the respective rules). The Pony Club does not condone or support the excessive use of either item. Such use will result in disciplinary action.

Part of the Pony Club journey sees each member develop their horsemanship and sportsmanship skills the training undertaken in rallies supports this ongoing development and will see members develop their skills and use of rider aids, both in hand and in ridden activity.

Rider weight

For animal welfare reasons, the combined weight of the rider and tack should be less than 20% of the weight of the horse/pony. Exceptions (e.g., where the animal is of a stocky or sturdy build) may be considered. Also, the rider's height (leg length) may be relevant for safety reasons. If there is disagreement on the suitability of a rider-horse/pony combination and arbitration is required, the opinion of an independent veterinarian who is approved to inspect licensed Riding Establishments for local authorities should be sought (see Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons website for inspectorate list).

Freedom to Show Natural Behaviour

The Pony Club strongly encourages ponies and horses to be kept in as natural an environment as possible. We encourage them to be kept in herds and/or near other equines.

Learning Theory

Learning theory (the science of how animals – and humans – learn) lies at the heart of good horsemanship and provides the underlying principles for correct training. 3 Fs to add support.....

Learning theory is based on the horse's natural ability to learn, primarily through being rewarded for exhibiting the behaviour that their rider/handler wants. For example, the rider applies pressure with their leg, the horse moves forward, and the pressure is released. As a result, the horse learns that it should move forward when they feel the pressure of the rider's leg. In addition to being highly effective, the correct use of learning theory helps to eliminate confusion, fear, and distress in horse/pony training.

Presentation

As part of attendance at Pony Club activities, members are encouraged to ensure their horse and pony are neat, tidy, and well-groomed. However, this does not extend to trimming whiskers around the eyes or nostrils. The Pony Club Position Statement on Whisker Trimming can be found on our website.

Applying makeup to ponies is discouraged. Although, in some people's estimation, make-up may enhance an animal's appearance for activities such as showing, there are equine alternatives which are more suited to the activity being undertaken. The Pony Club Position Statement on make-up can be found on the website.

In the best interest of the equine's health clipping the coat may support the ongoing health of the horse or pony, this is to be considered in line with professional guidance.

Hoof Oils and related products may be used to support the horse's health and well-being with the recommendation of suitable professionals. The treatments label is to be considered before the application.

Education, Training, and Tests

Members undertake training and education to develop understanding, knowledge, and skills to look after, care for and train horses and ponies for activities, including competition.

The Pony Club offers a variety of badges, awards and tests that support the growth of knowledge and understanding around caring for horses and ponies through to competing with them. The badges, awards and tests are assessed against a syllabus which must be achieved to attain a pass on the topic or test.

The achievement of a badge or test confirms that the member has displayed the appropriate knowledge, skill, and attributes as detailed in the syllabus. Through this provision, good horse management can be achieved. This includes stabling/keeping, feeding, and training and must not compromise horse welfare.

Through the educational provision, members and their families will develop an understanding and knowledge to support them in the training of equines. Horses

and ponies are to undergo training that matches their capabilities, maturity, and sport of interest. Horses and ponies are not to be subjected to training which causes fear or is abusive.

Any practices which could physically or mentally cause suffering will not be tolerated. Those involved in these situations will be subject to the codes of conduct and disciplinary procedures.

Find out about our education through members' [training](#) pages on the website.

Freedom from Discomfort

Accommodation

Where possible, members and their parents/carers are encouraged to allow horses and ponies to follow as close to the normal routine as possible whilst at Pony Club activities.

At events and competitions, stabling is often required to house the equine taking part. Guidance will be provided by team managers, officials, and volunteers to support members in caring for horses and ponies throughout their stay.

Consideration should be given to the types of bedding and food provided to support the horse/pony, to allow them to continue as much as possible with their normal routine.

Equines may need stabling to support ongoing health, especially for medical purposes, please consider enrichment activities to help with mental and physical stimulation. Guidance on this can be found through World Horse Welfare:

[Occupying a Stable Guidance from World Horse Welfare](#) or [Stabling a Horse Advice](#)

At some activities, it may be possible to “pen” equines. This allows more natural behaviours, access to forage, and socialising with other equines. Guidance for penning will be provided to those attending, e.g. shelter from the sun and inclement weather.

Transport

Attendance at Pony Club activities often requires horses/ponies to be transported. All journeys, long or short, must be planned carefully with equine welfare at the heart of decision-making, including being protected against injury and other health risks. Feeding and watering should be planned to support horse and pony health.

Vehicles are to be maintained to a high standard and in line with government requirements (road worthy), well-ventilated, disinfected regularly and driven by somebody whose driving licence permits them to drive the vehicle in question.

Members and families seeking additional support or advice should follow veterinary and/or local guidance in addition to the training provided by The Pony Club.

[Transporting your horse safely - World Horse Welfare](#) or [Practical Guidelines on the Watering of Equine Animals Transport by Road](#)

When an equine is ridden to an event, provisions must be made for access to these items including water and a headcollar.

Guidance can be found in The Pony Club General Horse Welfare [guidance](#)

Weather

Extreme weather conditions, both hot and cold, can occur during Pony Club activities. Special considerations will be taken by the event organisers to support a smooth running and safe environment for members and ponies/horses to take part in the activities.

When extreme weather conditions present themselves, owners and responsible persons are best placed to know if the conditions will be suitable for horses or ponies, including travelling to and from events.

In extreme conditions (e.g. summer temperatures forecast to be over 35 degrees Celsius, persistent driving rain, thunderstorms and blizzards), organisers have a responsibility to ensure the welfare of all involved.

If lightning strikes are expected at an event, the event should be suspended, temporarily or permanently, until the risk of a lightning strike has passed. The horses/ponies and people should shelter in vehicles if it is safe to do so.

Freedom from Fear and Distress

When providing its range of activities, The Pony Club, its officials, volunteers, and staff are committed to supporting horse welfare. All Pony Club activities take into consideration the equine and actions are always taken to ensure that they are free from fear and/ or distress. To support this goal, The Pony Club provides a range of education badges to increase awareness of the correct treatment of horses and ponies. Those deemed not to be living The Pony Club's values will be subject to disciplinary action.

Examples that can impact this Freedom and cause Fear and Distress are:

- Ongoing health concerns, including injury or illness.
- Use of the rider's leg, whips, and spurs.
- Poorly fitting tack and equipment.
- Lack of knowledge and understanding of how horses learn.
- Equines allowed time and opportunity to understand the situation.
- Situational impact on the equine's mental well-being.

Through Learning and Development members and their families are then able to provide a positive space for the Equine in their care.

Useful Links and Information/ Advice

Additional support

To optimise Equine's overall health and well-being, additional support can be sought through the provision of treatments such as massage, physiotherapy, chiropractic, and acupuncture. Advice for when the equine may be able to return to work and the intensity of this should be sought from the provider. By law, a referral to a veterinarian is usually required to support health and treatment.

Registered Therapists can be found via [The Institute of Registered Veterinary and Animal Physiotherapists](#)

Dental

All Equines should have dental checks at least once/year. However, some animals require assessment every 6 months or, if they have dental issues, more frequently than this. Owners should be using either a veterinary surgeon or a registered equine dental technician for these checks. You can find registered horse dentists via [the British Associate of Equine Dental Technicians](#).

Travelling

We encourage all Pony Club members/families to ensure their equine has practised loading/travelling before going out to events/rallies. It is important to make each travelling experience positive for the equine.

Carrying a travelling kit, appropriate to the length of the journey, is recommended. An example of what may be included is:

- First aid kit: surgical scrub (hibiscrub), cotton wool (swabs), vet wrap, sterile dressings, wound gels or similar
- Hoof pick
- Medications

Rugging

Equine clothing (Rugs) may cause discomfort, wearing these can lead to being too hot or cold as they impact the ability to regulate temperature and may cause physical harm.

Guidance to support accessing if and when equines wear rugs can be sought from the British Horse Society (BHS) in the [Guide to Rugging a Horse](#)

Worming

As part of ongoing welfare and health considerations, owners and responsible persons are encouraged to seek advice on deworming programmes. The Equines registered veterinary practice will be able to support and advise on a programme that will detect and manage any worm burden, whilst also minimising the risk that parasites will develop resistance to dewormers.