

Horse Welfare Board strategy – Summary

- Racing is clear that respect for the horse is at the heart of everything we do: every horse bred for racing will enjoy a life well lived.
- The sport's record shows it has made racing safer for jockeys and horses. The Board's ambition for racing to do even better is based on its long-term investment in veterinary science and technology. This has identified these three key areas of focus;
 1. Unprecedented use of data to prevent injury and manage safety
 2. Innovative work to measure horses' quality of life and wellbeing
 3. A commitment to lifetime responsibility, based on tracing every racehorse from birth
- We'd like the public, especially those unfamiliar with horses, to understand and accept how seriously we take our responsibility to our horses. Ultimately, this is a matter of public trust.
- The Board is independently-chaired and includes a former Sports Minister and MP as well as representatives from across the industry. Four members are qualified vets, including the Chair.

The publication of this strategy is a landmark moment for the sport. A unified and coordinated approach around welfare will bring together the remarkable people and first-class work that already exists in the industry to create something that is greater than the sum of its parts.

It focuses on the ambition that every horse bred to race should lead – and be seen to lead – “a life well-lived”. This commitment requires fuller traceability for horses bred for the sport, a strong focus on safety and wellbeing, a more confident and proactive approach to communications and the industry's biggest ever data project.

The horse is at the core of our philosophy and purpose, and our vision is one the industry should be inspired to attain. It ensures that, during a horse's lifetime, all facets of its welfare are scrutinised, understood and improved.

The Welfare Board Chair has praised the industry for its support in developing the strategy and called for this demonstration of unity and collective responsibility to be continued through the delivery of its recommendations.

Standards of care are already extraordinarily high, and the vast majority of racehorses undoubtedly lead a life well lived, but we want to be able to identify and further promote the factors that lead to the best possible quality of life.

The Board recognised that numerous welfare strategies exist across the sport, which include robust inspection, licensing and regulatory processes. Together, this has made racing safer for horses and jockeys and all contributes to the high quality of life enjoyed by thoroughbred horses. However, before today it did not have a single, overarching welfare strategy that reflects the contributions made by all parts of the industry.

The strategy has the full support of the Sport's governance and stakeholder bodies, representing competitors, owners, breeders and racecourses, as well as the BHA. External welfare agencies have been asked for their views and the Board appreciates their supporting in developing this strategy.

We've been enormously impressed by the positive approach taken by individuals and organisations, both within and outside racing, to the development of this strategy and look forward to together on the process of implementation.

CHANGING ATTITUDES

Changing attitudes to animals, and human behaviour towards animals, means that society has changing views on what is and is not acceptable.

Animal welfare has become a politically charged subject, so racing cannot afford to be complacent. In order to remain accepted by the wider public the sport must show greater ambition, unity and a collective responsibility for the sport's welfare standards, and to better explain those standards to the wider world.

The Welfare Board supports the principle of self-regulation. It must be appreciated as a privilege and not a right, but the sport could argue it takes more responsibility for welfare than would be possible under an independent model. Racing's discussions around welfare must be characterised by greater collaboration, confidence and unity. Care and concern for the horse is the thing that unites us and which therefore presents an enormous opportunity.

THE WHIP

- **The Horse Welfare Board has recommended that racing makes changes to the way the whip is used. As a minimum, there should be tougher penalties for misuse.**
- **The sport's independent regulator, the BHA, has been asked to consult on a variety of options for changing the penalties and the rules for using the whip. It has said it will do so via an open consultation which takes into account the views of all who take part, but it's clear these are decisions for racing to take and the BHA will seek the widest possible support for any changes.**
- **This consultation is not about taking away the whip. Anyone who's ridden a half-ton horse knows you need to be able to exercise control for the safety of horse and rider. This is about what should be allowable under our rules and ensuring that is understood and accepted by the public.**

We cannot afford to be complacent in relation to the potential for the whip to become a significant political issue. Amongst members of the public who have a perception that racing is cruel, concerns about the whip are ranked similarly to concerns around injuries and fatalities.

While many in the sport favour more education of the public on the whip, this is not practical, as we lack the resources to do this at the mass audience scale required.

The Board believes there is a case for change and review. The Board recommends, as a minimum, an increase in penalties for breaches of the rules. However, it has also recommended that the BHA conduct a consultation seeking views from the industry and other interested parties on a range of issues, including penalties for misuse and what should be classed as allowable use, mindful of the role that carrying a whip plays in safety.

While the consultation would be open to the public, any decision on the future of the whip should be made through close collaboration with the sport. The Welfare Board made no recommendations on the outcome of this consultation, though the need to increase penalties is a clear, minimum recommendation.

External views are vital to the process and will be given due consideration, but the BHA is aware that an open consultation needs to be appropriately managed.

This is a matter of public trust. We'd like people, especially those unfamiliar with horses, to understand and accept what's necessary for our jockeys to race safely in a fair sporting competition. We don't want to be regularly revisiting this issue, and would prefer to focus on the rest of the welfare strategy.

The BHA is already working with our partners in the sport to ensure that all can have confidence in the consultation.

COMMUNICATION

Communication (including engagement and education) around welfare is an area in which the industry has lacked impact. There is a strong desire in the industry to get onto the front foot, as we have a positive story to tell. The strategy gives us a platform to talk about all the good things we do with pride and confidence. That is why it is a pivotal moment, an opportunity to show that we can be trusted to do the right thing for our horses.

We concluded that the sport needs a more "campaigning" approach in its communication of welfare and to behave less like an industry and more like a movement, in which racing's people and supporters stand together in support of racing and the racehorse.

CONCLUSIONS

This is an ambitious strategy. Its ambition must be shared by the industry, which needs to invest in it appropriately. Inaction, or endless debate leading to inaction, is not an option.

We hope that those involved in the racing industry will be encouraged that strong foundations are already in place, and be heartened by our call for greater confidence, positivity and unity in communicating racing's welfare story.

Meanwhile, we hope that public and political audiences will be reassured and impressed by racing's dedication to the horses in its care, our willingness to listen and to be responsive, and our determination to strive for improvement.

Most importantly, we must all join together in championing our industry's greatest and most cherished asset, the Thoroughbred racehorse.