

Changes for the 2025/26 Jumps season

The British Horseracing Authority (BHA) can confirm the following changes to the Jump programme, which will be introduced with immediate effect. These have been developed and agreed following consultation and engagement with industry stakeholders. This covers:

1. More weight-for-age novices' chases as part of the Chasing Excellence initiative
 2. New requirements for Grade 1 Novices' and Juvenile hurdles
 3. Extension and adjustments to Junior National Hunt Hurdles programme
 4. Changes to the Go North Series
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1. More weight-for-age novices' chases added to the programme

An increased number of weight-for-age novices' steeple chases will be programmed this year, with the aim of supporting the development of higher-quality chasers in Britain.

The new Chasing Excellence initiative will see more Class 2 and 3 Beginners' Chases – weight-for-age contests restricted to horses that have not yet won a race over fences – and Novices' Chases replacing a significant number of Class 3 Novices' Limited Handicap Chases. These races will start in October 2025 and continue into 2026.

In recent seasons, the balance of opportunities for novices' chases at Class 1-3 level has been weighted towards handicaps rather than weight-for-age contests, with a 70:30 split in favour of handicaps between October and December 2024. This was with the aim of boosting competitiveness across the division – with field sizes increasing as a consequence.

But 2025/26 will see a greater focus on developing quality chasers for the future: around 70 percent of the Class 1 - 3 novices' chases run between October and December this year will be weight-for-age contests. The remaining Novices' Limited Handicaps will largely be placed on Saturday fixtures to ensure the most competitive races remain on our biggest days.

The increase in Beginners' Chases will allow more non-winning chasers to gain valuable experience in the early part of the season, while encouraging novice chasers that have won a race to make the step up into Pattern contests or novices' / non-novices' handicaps.

As the season goes on the programme will continue to provide increased weight-for-age chase opportunities, with the balance moving from Beginner to Novices' Chases towards the end of the season, by which time horses are more likely to require the opportunity to run under a penalty for a previous chase win.

Class 2 and 3 Beginner/Novices' Chases will be run for a minimum of £12,000 in 2025, with Class 3 contests rising to a minimum of £15,000 in 2026 and Class 2s increasing to £20,000 – reflecting the additional investment being made in supporting the future of quality Jump horses.

Explaining the change, BHA Head of Racing and Betting, Tom Byrne, said:

"With only two British-trained horses lining up in the Grade 1 novices' chases at the 2025 Cheltenham Festival, it was clear that action was needed to help develop our novice chasers.

"Data shows that the pace of novices' handicaps are typically faster than an equivalent weight-for-age race. This supported feedback we were receiving from trainers, who were suggesting that this was proving detrimental to the development of potentially high-quality horses who need to be given time to hone their jumping technique.

"By increasing the number of opportunities for horses to learn to jump in a more suitable environment, we want to see more of our top-quality horses reaching their full potential over fences.

“We also recognise the need to better incentivise connections to send their horses down the novice chase path in the first place, and we hope that the increased value of these Beginners’/Novices’ Chases will help do that.

“It’s fair to say that this change in approach may well result in smaller field sizes for some of our novice contests in the short term, in particular those run mid-week. However, we hope it will support our higher profile Pattern races (both novice and non-novice), where we have the ambition of providing competitive racing for customers in the sport’s main shop window.

“It’s important to recognise that this increase in weight-for-age novices’ chases is a deliberate move, one which we firmly believe is a positive and necessary step that balances shorter-term impacts with our longer-term ambition of enhancing the number of high-quality chasers being owned, trained and raced in Britain.”

2. New requirements for Grade 1 Novices’ and Juvenile hurdles

Horses will only be permitted to run in Grade 1 Novices’ and Juvenile Hurdle races if they have been allotted a rating or an assessment of 110 or more by the BHA Handicapper, taking account of races run up to and including the day prior to confirmation.

This either requires horses to have a published handicap mark of 110 or higher, or for horses which have only run once or twice, have been assessed by the BHA handicappers as having met or exceeded the required level of performance. Any horse that has not done so would be removed from the race at Confirmation Stage.

The change, which will be introduced immediately, brings the novice and juvenile hurdle division into line with Open Grade 1 Chases and Hurdles and Grade 1 Novices’ Chases – all of which require a minimum rating to participate.

This seeks to ensure that horses competing in these showpiece races have demonstrated an appropriate level of ability over hurdles before they run in a Grade 1 – something to support:

- **Development:** Grade 1 contests are often run at a quicker pace, with greater tactical complexity and higher demands on jumping. Encouraging horses to gain early experience in less competitive races supports schooling and acclimatisation, potentially reducing the risk of errors and improving safety for equine and human participants.
- **Race quality and competitiveness:** Requiring horses to have demonstrated a minimum level of form and ability for these races can help maintain the standards expected of a Grade 1 as a sporting contest. The intervention also aims to strengthen the quality of racing across the entire season, by encouraging connections to identify opportunities during the wider racing calendar, rather than simply targeting horses at the spring festivals.
- **Customer engagement:** The new requirements can provide a better guide and improve transparency for customers – helping to ensure these contests remain compelling betting prospects, which is particularly important on high-profile racedays.

Tom Byrne said:

“Juvenile and Novices’ Hurdles are designed to nurture young, developing horses, allowing them to find their place within the jump hierarchy. We recognise that horses competing in these contests will be lightly raced and that connections will be using the races to assess potential ability.

“Nevertheless, the 10 Grade 1 Novice and Juvenile races that are run through the Jump season are pinnacle events for customers and participants alike that we believe require an intervention to ensure they meet the highest standards. This is not about excluding unexposed or promising horses; it is intended to ensure these races remain competitive and offer a compelling prospect.

“There has also been consideration of the safety aspect and supporting a horse’s development. By ensuring horses have gained vital early experience we can be confident that they are best prepared for the faster, more competitive and tactically demanding environment of our Grade 1 contests – something that can help reduce the likelihood of incident or injury.

“While we are working with relatively small sample sizes, the analysis we have done shows that with the exception of last year’s Triumph Hurdle winner, horses that have not demonstrated a level of ability over hurdles prior to these races tend to perform to similar levels – beating very few horses and in many cases being tailed off or pulled up.

“We understand that there will be differing views on this decision, but the change brings novices’ and juvenile Grade 1 Hurdles into line with all other Grade 1s and helps protect their role in the development of our most promising young horses”.

3. Extension and adjustments to Junior National Hunt Hurdles programme

Junior National Hunt Hurdles provide younger horses (three years old at the beginning of the Jumps season) with the opportunity to start their careers over hurdles at an earlier stage than has typically been the case in Britain.

They differ from Juvenile Hurdles in that they are restricted to horses that have not run on the Flat, or indeed in any race prior to the beginning of October of that season.

These races have been well supported by owners and trainers since being introduced in October 2022 and remain an important part of wider efforts to nurture the development of Jump horses in Britain.

We are pleased to confirm the industry’s commitment to a further three-years of the programme, which we hope will provide added stability and confidence for connections to source horses and plan their campaigns accordingly.

The following changes will also be introduced for the 2025/26 season, with the aim of refining and enhancing the race type and programme:

- The start of the Junior NH Hurdle season will move to the beginning of November (from October) to allow trainers more time to develop these horses at home. Overall race volume for the season will remain the same.
- A penalty for a win in a Junior NH Hurdle will not be carried into other race types in future, except in other Junior NH Hurdles and in Class 1 races. This includes in Juvenile and Novices’ Hurdle races during the same season. Winners will still lose their maiden status over Jumps.
- Non-winners of Junior NH Hurdles will be permitted to drop back to ‘Junior National Hunt Flat races’ (3YO only before the end of the year or 4YO only after 31 December), run until the end of the season. The exclusion of winners of Junior NH Hurdles from Junior National Hunt Flat races will be dealt with via race conditions.

4. Changes to the Go North Series

The Go North Series continues to offer meaningful end-of-season targets for connections – particularly those horses trained in the North – and the weekend showcase provides a competitive spectacle of Jump racing in the region.

In 2026 the Series Finals will be run for increased values, with each race worth at least £40k (up from £30k in 2025). This will be increased further to £45k in 2027 and £50k per final by 2028.

These higher values aim to attract more runners and strengthen northern Jump racing, including through incentivising the owning and training of horses in the region.

To help enhance the performance of the series, both in terms of competitiveness, but also in attracting a high percentage of Northern-based runners, the following changes to the programme have been agreed following a wider review:

- A new **'Forgive 'n 'Forget' Novices' Handicap Chase Series** introduced. The qualifiers for the Forgive 'n Forget will be Class 4 and 5 Novices' Handicap Chases in the North. The final will be run over 2m 5f 133y at Kelso.
- A new **'Night Nurse' Handicap Hurdle Series** introduced. The qualifiers for the 'Night Nurse' will be made up of Class 2 – 4 Juvenile and Novices'/Maiden WFA Hurdle races in the North. The final will be for 4YO+ and run over 2m 3f 171y at Musselburgh.
- The 'Lady Buttons' Mares' Hurdle Series and 'Grey Bomber' Juvenile Hurdle Series have both been removed.
- The 'Jodami' NHF Series has been removed, though the intention is to keep a valuable stand-alone NHF on Kelso's Go North card.

The full programme of Go North Series finals, which will each be worth a minimum of £40k and take place during finals weekend across Musselburgh, Kelso and Carlisle between 20 and 22 March 2026 is as follows:

- **Sea Pigeon Handicap Hurdle** - 2m, Musselburgh
- **Night Nurse Handicap Hurdle** - 2m 4f, Musselburgh
- **Brindisi Breeze Handicap Hurdle** - 3m, Musselburgh
- **Cab On Target Handicap Hurdle** - 2m4f, Kelso
- **Forgive 'n Forget Novices' Handicap Chase** – 2m 5f, Kelso
- **One Man Handicap Chase** - 2m, Carlisle
- **Monet's Garden Handicap Chase** - 2m4f, Carlisle
- **Red Rum Handicap Chase** - 3m, Carlisle