

Older Horse Policy



Riding Establishment:

We are committed to ensuring the health, well-being, and dignity of our horses, including those in their senior years. This policy outlines the management, care, and use of older horses to ensure they remain happy, healthy, and fit for purpose, while respecting their limitations.

Purpose

To establish guidelines for the care, workload, and retirement of older horses, ensuring compliance with welfare legislation and promoting ethical treatment.

Definition

For the purposes of this policy, an older horse is defined as horse, normally aged 16 and above which has entered a transitional period leading to retirement. The decision on whether to a horse is to be considered 'older' should be based on veterinary advice and will depending on individual health and fitness.

Policy Principles

1. Health and Welfare Monitoring:

- **Veterinary Checks:** Older horses will undergo veterinary check-ups at least twice annually to assess their health and suitability for work.
- **Condition Scoring:** Horses will be monitored regularly for body condition with adjustments made to their diet or workload as needed.
- **Dental and Farriery Care:** Routine dental checks and farriery services will be provided to maintain comfort and usability.
- **Joint and Pain Management:** Horses showing signs of arthritis or discomfort will be managed with appropriate treatments, such as joint supplements, medication, or therapies, as advised by the vet.

2. Workload and Use:

- The workload of older horses will be adjusted to reflect their capacity and aligned to restrictions associated with the health and condition. This may include:
 - Assigned lighter workloads, such as beginner lessons, walk-only hacks, or therapeutic riding.
 - Ensuring they are not used for strenuous or athletic activities (such as jumping).

- Reducing their daily and weekly working hours and assigning more frequent rest days.
- Older horse should be assessed for their fitness for work will be assessed on an ongoing basis by staff.

3. Diet and Nutrition:

- Special Feeding Plans: Older horses will be provided with age-appropriate feeds, including high-fibre and easily digestible options. Feed will be soaked if dental issues are present.
- Access to Forage: Free access to forage or suitable alternatives will be provided to maintain gut health and prevent boredom.
- Weight Monitoring: Horses will be regularly weighed or body condition scored to ensure they are maintaining an appropriate weight.

4. Comfort and Living Conditions:

- Shelter and Bedding: When appropriate and dependent on weather/temperature conditions, older horses will have access to warm, dry stabling with deep, soft bedding to support joints.
- Turnout: Daily turnout will be prioritized to promote mobility and mental well-being, even during winter months.
- Individual Needs: Adjustments to living arrangements will be made to suit the individual needs of older horses, including appropriate weight rugs in cold weather.

5. Retirement Planning:

- Criteria for Retirement: Horses are intelligent and curious animals and are designed to move, graze, and explore for many hours daily. They are also creatures of habit and can struggle with significant change. Transitioning from an active lifestyle to a sedentary one without proper adjustment can impact their mental and physical health. If practical, activities levels should be reduced slowly to provide continued mental stimulation and support natural behaviours, with enrichment activities being introduced where required. Furthermore, maintaining manageable levels of exercise will contribute to sustaining healthy circulation, digestion and joint function. Horses will be retired when they are no longer able to perform their role comfortably, as determined by the vet, staff, and observation of their behaviour. Signs of fatigue, chronic pain, or loss of interest in work will be considered.
- Retirement Options: Retired horses will:
 - Remain at the riding school as a companion animal.

- Be rehomed responsibly to a trusted individual or retirement centre.
- Be euthanized humanely if no other suitable option exists and their quality of life is compromised.

6. End-of-Life Decisions:

- **Quality of Life Assessments:** Regular evaluations will ensure the horse's quality of life is maintained. When this is no longer possible, euthanasia will be considered in consultation with the vet.
- **Humane Euthanasia:** This will be undertaken in accordance with our Horse Death & Euthanasia Procedure.

7. Compliance with Welfare Standards:

This policy adheres to the following legislation and guidelines:

- **Animal Welfare Act 2006:** Meeting the five welfare needs: diet, environment, health, behaviour, and companionship.
- **Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018:** Ensuring appropriate care of all horses used in riding school activities.
- **ABRS+ Standards:** Following best practices for equine care.

8. Staff and Client Education:

- **Staff Training:** Staff will receive training on recognising the signs of aging and managing older horses.
- **Client Awareness:** Clients will be informed about the special care older horses require and encouraged to treat them gently and respectfully.

9. Records:

- **Visits by Horse Welfare specialists:** Horse records will be updated following vet, farrier, dentist, physiotherapist or other specialist visit.
- **Other Records:** Other horse welfare records (such as Horse Assessment Form, Condition Monitoring Record, Feed Record, Horse Training Plan, etc) will also be maintained and amended as required to reflect the horse's condition and any restrictions on use.