

World Horse Welfare Conference 2019 – “WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?”

The Royal Geographical Society, London, Wed November 13th, 2019



WHW CEO Roly Owers

“At a time in society when accountability all too often seems to slip through our fingers, it is vital that the horse sector actively recognise, understand and meet our responsibilities to address the many persistent welfare challenges we see and to bring about genuine change.”

Introduction written by Nadine Brandtner

Horse Welfare is a growing topic that is challenging all branches of the equine industry. Animal protection activists that lobby against horse racing and the use of horses in sport drive negative press in the media. Many branches of the industry have taken a defensive approach, or have not communicated to the public enough, that horse welfare is on their agenda. We are all responsible to ensure the welfare of our horses. And we all need to create awareness what horse welfare is, and how we are doing our part to take responsibility for our horses.

But what does responsibility mean and how do we take responsibility?

As breeders our responsibility does not only lie with the horses that we breed now. We need to think long-term. Once you sell the horses you have bred, is that the end of your responsibility? With the continual progress that scientific research is enabling, we need to consider what the implications of the choices we make in breeding are. Where are the ethical boundaries of using modern reproductive techniques and genomic selection, that take us further and further away from traditional breeding? Are we at risk of producing horses via a production line? What happens to horses bred that do not have the quality to perform in their intended function?

But welfare also needs to be considered in simpler terms – how horses are kept on a day-to-day basis. Just because we have always done something one way, does not necessarily mean that we are doing it right. New scientific evidence frequently teaches us that we need to change the way we do things. From how we fit a saddle and a bridle, to new discoveries about equine nutrition and dental care in horses, even if they are not ridden and using a bit, to training techniques, surfaces and equipment that can reduce the risk of injuries. For some of us these things are already indisputable. But for others change may be hard to accept.

Communication is key to ensuring responsibility, in order to share with those that have welfare concerns, that we are doing our part: To advocate for the horse when lobbying for change at regional and national level, and in terms of governance. To educate and help those that need to learn how to care better for their horses.

Collectively we have a louder voice and can achieve more. Which is why the WBFSH is proud to be part of the European Horse Network and collaborate with international organisations such as World Horse Welfare. Last month WHW held its annual conference in London/United Kingdom, and I had the pleasure to attend, the theme of this year's conference being "Who is responsible". An inspiring day which has certainly got me thinking how I can make a difference.

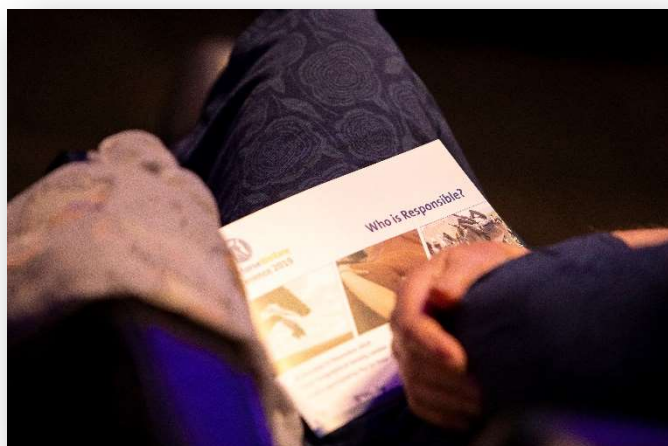
The 2019 Conference - Opening:

The conference opened with a short but emotionally powerful film, which highlighted that the love that man has for the horse as a companion, working equid, athlete comes with responsibility for its well-being. Sadly, there has been a rising trend in welfare concerns worldwide, often for horses in large groups. Equine welfare charities alongside other agencies are striving to address the welfare concerns and causes. Collaboration between organisations and NGOs, as well as working at parliamentary level is vital. The OIE (World Organisation for Animal Health), UN (United Nations) and FAO (Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations) all have working animals on their agenda. The International Coalition of Working Equids (ICWE) is working with the OIE to provide training to support national government initiatives to help make these welfare standards a reality around the world.

But at the level of the general public, their role as the eyes and ears of the equine charity world is important, for they take responsibility when identifying and reporting equine and other animal welfare concerns. Developing a new generation of responsible horse owners is vital. The media and social media can have a significant, positive influence on this, as can celebrity role models, to educate and support promotion of the correct way to treat and care for horses.

Communication is key to ensuring responsibility. WHW has been working to develop ways to engage hard-to-reach communities, as well as gaining understanding of mental health issues around animal hoarding. The wider horse-owning community also has a responsibility for ensuring horse welfare. With the outbreaks of Equine influenza, responsible show organisers and horse events have rightfully banned horses that have not been properly vaccinated. Sport has a significant responsibility in welfare, not only in protecting horses and ensuring safety during competition and racing, but for the duration of the horse's life, not just during its sport career. Equestrian sport governing bodies like the International Equestrian Federation (FEI) and national equestrian federations need to provide an accurate, evidence-based approach to their rules and regulations.

The 2019 conference explored who is responsible and how we can gain an understanding of what this means for horses and for ourselves. To achieve this the topics and speakers were aptly chosen to underline various areas of responsibility. Some of these are summarised below.



Taking responsibility in racing: our horses, our future (Annamarie Phelps – Vice Chair of the British Olympic Association BOA and Chair of the British Horse-racing Authority BHA)



The racing industry worldwide faces continuous pressure in terms of horse welfare and perceived welfare of racehorses, often leaving the industry on the defensive to justify racing. This applies to perception of welfare both during their racing career and what happens to those horses that don't make the grade for racing. But also, for retired racehorses, the reality being that racehorses have a short

career with respect to their life span. To meet this ethical challenge in order to gain public trust, stakeholders in the industry need to be more open, inclusive and honest about the reality of the lives of these athletes and working animals. The fact that there is a moral debate about the use of horses in sport and leisure must be acknowledged.

The benefits of horses and humans in sport & society outweigh the risk, but we all must be aware what the risks are, manage them and minimise avoidable risks. BHA as the British governing body of racing takes its accountability seriously, not just on the racecourse, but also before and after a horse's racing career.

The racing industry consists of a network of professionals (trainers, jockeys, grooms, vets, nutritionists, farriers, etc) that work together to look after its horses to the highest standards. Horses must be fit, healthy & happy horses to give their best on the racecourse, and their performance requires them to trust. Racehorses are cared for around the clock, with meticulous attention to detail regarding nutrition, training and health. In recent years BHA has invested £32million in veterinary research, which has also helped the Animal Health Trust fund work on equine influenza.



BHA have put together an industry-wide Horse Welfare Board (HWB), where the BHA as an equine welfare regulator sits alongside representatives from all aspects of the sport. The HWB is currently

developing a strategy to cover the whole industry and not just the regulated areas that are currently being covered. It will also include topics such as the use of the whip and the issues this raises, and traceability of racehorses throughout their lifetime, to secure welfare outcomes of retired racehorses as well. The BHA's charity "Retraining of Racehorses" helps horses along this journey.

Being responsible means being as evidence-based as possible, minimising risk and maximising benefit. Assessing the benefit in terms of environment, diet, veterinary care etc is fairly straightforward. But what about from the perspective of the horse? The wellbeing of the horses in racing is harder to quantify. Is it possible to make a conclusion from their exuberance and willingness to give their all to their riders/jockeys? The BHA have commissioned a project with Bristol University to identify factors that contribute the most to the quality of life of horses in racing. If this is successful, it should be possible to identify factors of well-being to horses in other disciplines and leisure too.

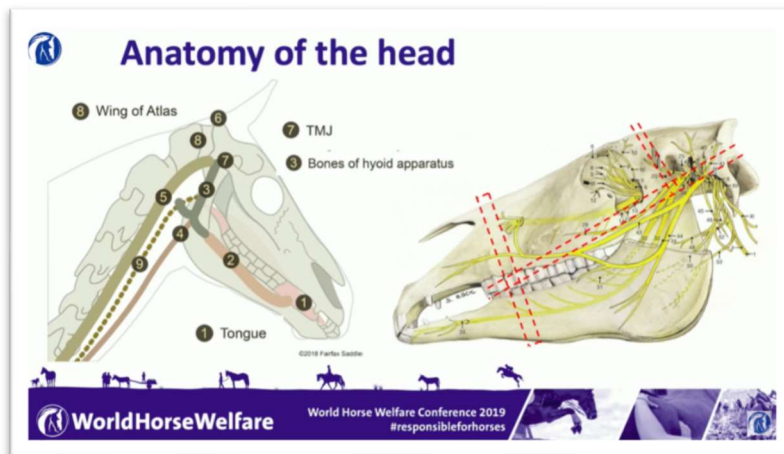


When it comes to assessing risk, in any sport or physical activity, the complete avoidance of risk is not possible. But over the past twenty years racecourse fatalities have fallen by a third. It is continually reviewed how this can further be reduced, through improving racecourse surfaces, medical research, veterinary care and training techniques for injury

prevention. Injury rates differ between training yards and racecourses. To understand why this is, the BHS collects and analyses robust data to complement the intuition that has been developed over years of working with horses, by building a model that can help identify risks and reduce them where possible.

BHA tracks public opinions in surveys about the acceptability of using horses in sport. In 2011 the gap between those in favour and those not, was 26%. In 2018 this statistic was down to 14% and highlights the changing public attitude towards animals over the last seven years and the decrease in the perception of welfare. Therefore, there is a need to connect more effectively with people outside of racing. This means to communicate the responsibility that is being taken within the industry, and to engage with those that are questioning whether the industry is taking measures to ensure horse welfare. This also means educating people about horses and their needs. And empathy should be shown to those that have concerns, because they care enough to raise questions. The passion that there is within the sport should be used to inspire people, because the power of emotion is often louder than words or evidence.

Don't forget about the bridle: The importance of the correct bridle fit (Dr Rachel Murray Ph.D. Vet. Sc. University of Cambridge)



Riders often think carefully about the saddles they use on their horses and ensure to get them fitted. But there is frequently less awareness about the importance of the bridle and its fit. Bridles are used across all disciplines but also by working equids.

Dr Murray explained the complexity of the equine head. Using illustrations, she

pointed out important structures such as the mouth and tongue, bones of the hyoid apparatus (which articulates with the skull, and gives biomechanical form and function to the larynx, pharynx and tongue), the temporomandibular joint (the TMJ is the joint between the mandible/lower jaw bone and maxilla/upper jaw bone and is used for chewing) and wings of the atlas (topmost vertebra which connects the spine to the skull).

The illustration on the innervation of the head showed how many nerves are situated in areas where the bridle routinely sits. There is growing awareness and concerns about specific issues relating to the bridle (in particular nosebands and bits), some of which are heavily supported by research.

ORAL LESIONS

Issues that are less frequently discussed but require awareness, are the formation of oral lesions in the mouth (inside cheeks, lips and interdental regions).

Studies in competition horses showed that the incidence of oral lesions varies according to discipline:

POLO PONIES	15%
RACEHORSES	53%
ICELANDIC HORSES	62% (of horses ridden in a snaffle bit)
DANISH COMPETITION HORSES	9.2%

The possible reasons for the formation of lesions were postulated as being a result of noseband fit (or lack of using a noseband at all), type of bit used and its fit, or poor dental care.

Inadequate dental care is in fact a frequent cause of mouth lesions (inside the cheeks and lips), due to sharp enamel edges (96%), focal overgrowth (46%), fissure fractures or cracks (54%), periodontal disease (24%) and other fractures (12%).

In the studies on dental care referenced, 95% of horses over 15 years of age have undiagnosed dental disease, as do 70% of horses under the age of 15. (Ref Mata et al 2015; Bjornsdottir et al 2014; Udahl & Clayton 2018).

However, oral lesions on the bars of the mouth (interdental region) were found to be more strongly correlated to ill-fitting bits and nosebands.

POLO PONIES	28%
RACEHORSES	30%
ICELANDIC HORSES	51% (of horses ridden with a curb bit)

Lesions in the corner of the mouth can be attributed to poorly fitting bits (too wide therefore unstable and moving, or too narrow therefore pinching), or instability of the bridle (due to poor fit or absence of the noseband).

NOSEBAND & HEADPIECE UNIT



Although the noseband contributes to the stability of the bridle on the horse's head, it is not the only structure to consider. The noseband works as a unit with the headpiece. As the horse's head moves, there will be pressure variations along parts of the noseband/headpiece unit, specifically in the area of the poll. Where the noseband is firmly attached to the

headpiece, pressure variations are more likely than with a noseband that is connected to the headpiece by side rings, or if a Micklem bridle is used. These allow for individual movement of the bridle units with the head, decreasing fluctuating pressure.

Specific pressure areas from the bridle on the head have been studied and whether there is a significant effect on the horse if the pressure areas are addressed. To carry out the study, pads for measuring pressure were placed in specific areas under the bridles of internationally competing horses that had well-fitted bridles. (Ref Murray, Guire, Fisher & Fairfax 2015)



Different parts of the bridle (headpiece, area of browband attachment and noseband) exert intermittent pressure, which was found to be dependent on the phase of the movement of the horse.

Pressure under the noseband is highest when a horse meets the floor after a jump or in the canter. At push-off, the pressure is highest under the headpiece. And mid-air there is no pressure in either area. In the trot more movement in the headpiece was observed, creating intermittent pressure in the area at the base of the ears, the TMJ and hyoid apparatus, as well as against the edges of the atlas. A wide headpiece gives more pressure against the front of the atlas. There is focal pressure under the area where there are buckles on the top or the sides of the headpiece. Rolled bridles also give more pressure.

THE NOSEBAND

The pressure from the noseband varies depending on the type of noseband, its stiffness and the position of the horse's head. The height of the noseband (i.e. its position relative to the facial crest) is important, as pressure exerted from a noseband that sits too high, has been associated with decreased hindlimb movement. A stiff noseband such as a non-ringed Cavesson will create

more pressure than a grackle and a drop noseband, which give more freedom of movement. Overall, a grackle exerts the least pressure of all nosebands. But correct fitting is still essential because despite lower pressure, the freedom of movement is linked to multiple areas where pressure can be created from a poor fit.

Noseband type

Conventional cavesson

- Asymmetric pressures - leather and buckle
- ↑ pressure - narrow/no padding
- ↑↑ pressure - buckle right on jaw bone
- Fixed unit with headpiece - cannot move with head

Crank cavesson

- More symmetrical pressure
- Lower peak pressures at risk locations
- Moves with head because articulates at side joints

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A long jaw pad decreases pressure on the jaw. Padding under the noseband may reduce pressure but also can decrease stability or redistribute pressure to another area. Therefore, padding should be carefully considered. A wider, old-fashioned Cavesson with a buckle on only one side exerts asymmetric pressure on the side of the face. Its buckle directly under the jaw creates direct pressure in that area. In comparison a crank Cavesson with side joints exerts more symmetrical pressure and less pressure underneath the jaw.

Noseband type

Flash

- Highest pressures in most locations
- Flash strap pulls down on
 - Top noseband - ↑ pressure
 - Headpiece - ↑ pressure

Flash strap

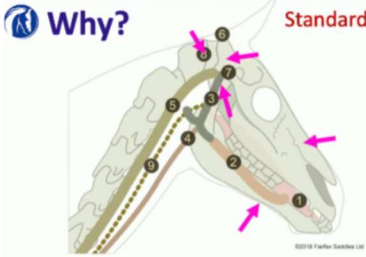
- ◆ Attachment
- ◆ Buckle
- ◆ chin

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A flash noseband exerts the highest pressure in most locations. Specifically, at the point where the flash comes off the Cavesson, there is pressure in multiple directions.

BRIDLE DESIGN

Why?



Standard bridle – interfere with muscle attachments

- Flexion head/neck
- Protraction forelimb
- Tongue
- Hyoid apparatus to sternum
- Hyoid apparatus to scapula

Modified bridle - Improve

- Forelimb movement
- Lifting of withers
- Hindlimb flexion

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Taking the anatomical structure of the horse's head into consideration, as well as the principles of where and how pressure is exerted by a bridle, has resulted in improved bridle design over the years. Design aspects to increase comfort and freedom of movement were pointed out using an illustration of the Fairfax Performance Bridle.

When the performance horses mentioned in the study above, were re-assessed under saddle wearing a modified bridle, it was found that, compared to the result when the horses were wearing their own bridles, forelimb protraction increased by 4.2%, carpal (knee) flexion by 4.1% and tarsal (hock) flexion by 3.5%.

Bridle designed to limit pressure



Pressure points

- Central lozenge - ↑ stability
- Sides narrow - avoid ears and wings atlas
- Splits lowered - ↑ stability
- Noseband attaches both sides - avoid midline pressure
- Prolite cushions - raise bridle off head over pressure point
- Headpiece & noseband lined with Prolite
- Prolite pad - maintain clearance either side of the nasal bone
- Large rings - noseband articulates with head movement

World Horse Welfare World Horse Welfare Conference 2019 #responsibleforhorses Fairfax Performance Bridle UK Patent Application No. 251,174 (01.02.2014)

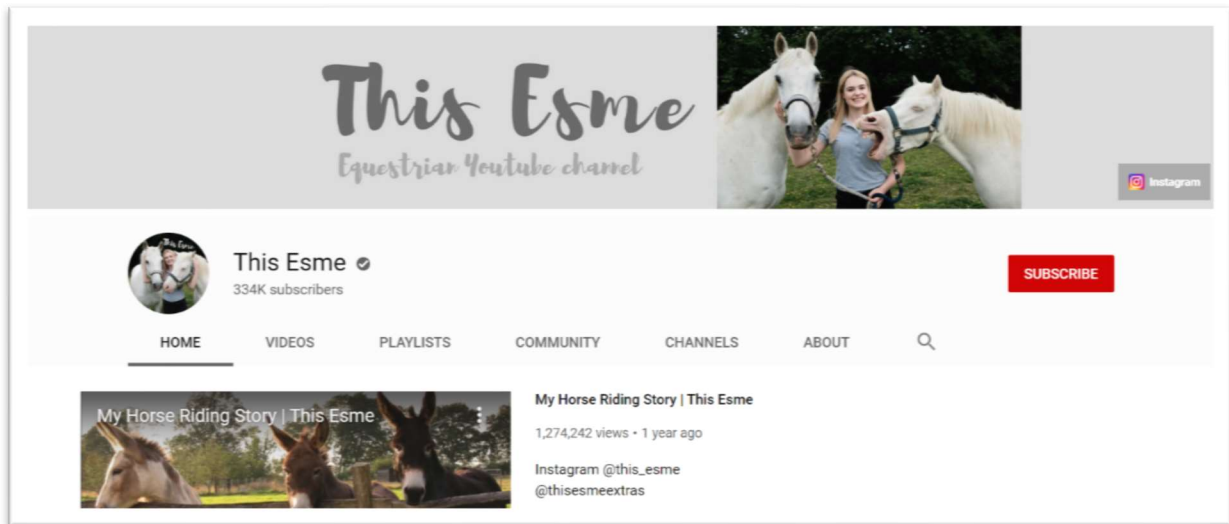
When fitting a bridle, the individual horse needs to be assessed because if looked at closely, they frequently don't have symmetrical faces, and proportions can vary greatly. A horse with a short head and distance between the mouth and the facial crest needs a noseband that isn't too wide, to ensure enough distance from the facial crest. In a stallion with a large neck crest, there may be a tendency for the headpiece to be pushed forward. A horse with short bars of the mouth needs a bit that isn't too wide.

In summary, Dr Murray pointed out that routine dental care is an important element of a comfortable bridle fit. Noseband tightness and the type of bit are only 2 elements of overall optimal bridle fitting and horse welfare. She is currently working together with WHW to put together specific guidelines to help with correct bridle fitting.

In response to a question about bit-less bridles posed to Dr Murray during the panel discussion, she explained that the pressure can be much greater over the nose with bit-less bridles, and actually increasing pressure across the entire face. But there have been studies to look at how much pressure you need for a horse to respond, and it was found that the pressure required is related to the level of training. A trained horse can respond to far less pressure. The correct way to use a bit-less bridle to improve the comfort of the horse is therefore subject to education and training.

Responsibility – a personal perspective (This Esme)

Esme Higgs is an 18-year old equestrian enthusiast, and worldwide YouTube sensation. Her channel is called “This Esme”. As an equestrian of the next generation she was not able to join the conference in person but was invited by World Horse Welfare to talk about her personal view on the core of responsibility via digital video transmission.



Esme began making small videos in 2015 as a video diary to track the progress with her horse Casper. After about a year of posting videos she started receiving emails from her viewers, some saying they had started taking riding lessons because of her, or that they had learnt a lot about basic horse care. She was surprised to even get feedback from families all over the world that had decided to move from the city to the country and bought properties or stables to keep horses.

Her engaging content has been watched more than 53 million times. She has 333.000 subscribers on YouTube, 143.000 followers on Instagram and almost 4000 likes on Facebook. When she realised what a big influence she was having on her followers, having “accidentally and unwittingly” become a role model, she knew she had a responsibility for the content of her videos to be correct and educational.

There is a new generation that is very concerned about animal welfare and is often influenced by negative press and social media exposure. It is a widely shared view, by people in the industry and outside of it, that horse welfare is the most important thing. So instead of discounting the concerns of others, those that are in the industry should be accountable and show that they are deserving of sharing a partnership with these incredible animals.

Therefore, Esme wanted to create something positive and beneficial, and to let people know that if you get into horses, you need to do so for the right reasons. One needs to accept the huge responsibility and commitment in terms of time, effort and money.

She regularly posts vlogs with ponies, horse care videos, and edits of her riding to help other equestrians learn about all aspects of keeping horses, including grooming and mucking out. In the past year she has made a video to spread awareness of equine flu and the importance of maintaining a vaccination schedule. She has now branched out to vlog with equestrian celebrities, experts and welfare charities including World Horse Welfare, using social media as a powerful tool to promote the causes of other groups that are passionate about horses, such as the British Horse Society and the Riding for the Disabled Society. She has been able to attend some top international events, had a look behind the scenes and visited some leading competition yards, which has helped her appreciate just how well these equine athletes are looked after, “like superstars, which they are”.

Esme Higgs’ initiative and cooperation with other organisations is a good example for how collectively one can have a louder voice, to educate, advocate for horses and make a difference.

Animal hoarding: Why telling doesn’t work (Bronwen Williams)

Bronwen Williams has been a registered mental health nurse for 37 years, as well as an independent trainer and educator. She has a strong interest in the psychology of the relationships between humans and their animals, and how companion animals can reduce or increase risks for those with mental illness. She has undertaken independent research into animal hoarding and is currently delivering a project with WHW, which aims to train welfare staff in interventions for those at risk of or involved in equine hoarding, which is becoming an increasingly serious problem in the sector.

There is much interest in the subject by the media and the general public, but there is very little research in the area and sadly the topic is also often a source of jokes. Animal hoarding has a huge impact on the animals and humans involved, as well as the environment and the communities in which it occurs. Animal hoarders can be from various socio-economic backgrounds. Addressing the audience Bronwen Williams said, “It can occur to people like us”, and it can even occur to people from professional backgrounds like veterinary and medicine. It is far more common than is often realised but is also different and more complex than the hoarding of objects. Dealing with animal hoarding requires cooperation between a number of agencies.

Research, done mostly on smaller animals such as dogs and cats, shows that hoarding of animals may be similar to other addictive or compulsive behaviours, such as addiction to substances or compulsive gambling. The keeping of large numbers of animals in itself is not an indication of hoarding.

Keeping a large number of animals is not itself indicative of hoarding;

Hoarding occurs when:

A number of animals are not being cared for adequately

They are in an environment that is not appropriate

Basic needs are unmet

Or they are ill and not receiving veterinary attention and treatment.



Definition of Animal Hoarding:

The keeping of a number of animals under inadequate conditions and care – the environment is not appropriate, so that basic needs are not met, or animals are ill and not receiving appropriate veterinary treatment.

Compulsive hoarding can be characterized as a symptom of mental disorder rather than deliberate cruelty towards animals. Hoarders are deeply attached to their pets and find it extremely difficult to let the pets go. They typically cannot comprehend that they are harming their pets by failing to provide them with proper care.

Animals can be acquired passively, where the situation gets out of hand unconsciously, or actively, where the owner or carer goes out consciously seeking more animals.

Animal hoarding is characterised by recidivism, meaning that if animals are removed from the owner, the owner will either find a way to get the animals back or acquire new animals. Shockingly this can even occur on the same day as the original animals were removed.

Research has proposed three types of animal hoarding, but it is acknowledged that these types are not definitive.

1. *Overwhelmed caregiver* – when the situation gets out of hand, possibly due to financial or physical reasons, and owners are unable to adequately care for the animals they already have. Out of control or indiscriminate breeding can also be a factor.
2. *Rescue or mission driven* – individuals actively seek and take in animals, sometimes purporting to be a sanctuary or charity, and often being supported by others or fuelled by social media. Indicators that rescues or sanctuaries are possible hoarding situations:
 - have a no-kill policy
 - not having an upper limit of the number of animals they are able to care for
 - not rehoming any of the animals that are taken in or giving guardianships
3. *Exploitative* – normally undertaken by individuals that have no empathy and no passion for animals, and are operating purely to exercise control over others (either human or animal, or both)

Qualitative Studies:

The fact that qualitative studies on animal hoarding focussed mostly on small companion animals, and that there was so little information on horses, caught Bronwen William's interest. She initiated an independent qualitative study as an unpaid researcher, looking at equine welfare cases where multiple equines were involved and assessing if there were any parallels to the results of studies done in small animals.

Findings after assessing equine welfare cases to establish if they fit the description of animal hoarding:

The animals

- The number of horses ranged from a few horses to over a hundred.
- In addition to the equines, there were frequently other species involved in the hoarding. But it was noted that where a single breed of horse was hoarded, if other species were involved, it would be a single breed of each of those species.
- Significant psychological and physical suffering of the horses involved.
- The equines were frequently unhandled and not used to human contact, posing a risk to those that need to catch and handle them. It was also common that owners wanted to let their equines live naturally in large herds but neglected and with some horses ill or dying.

The Owners

- The description of the owners in these cases fitted with the literature (overwhelmed caregiving, rescue/mission-drive, exploitative)
- Two new types of hoarding behaviour were identified:

- *Naive owners/helpers*: often well-meaning but ignorant and possibly vulnerable themselves but took on the horses with little knowledge how to care for them, or how much time and resources are required to do so.
- *Indiscriminate breeders or studs*: one example being trying to breed “The One” (the smallest, the spottiest, the fastest (yes, thoroughbreds!), the next top show pony...) In some cases, the breeders were driven by a desire to earn money, or to gain or regain a reputation. This form of breeding produces a huge amount of wastage – animals that don’t make the grade and for whom there is no use. It is postulated that the compulsion to breed “The One” displays elements of ill mental health.

Environment/Conditions the equines were kept in

- Often there were different standards for different animals in the same environment (e.g. mares kept better than stallions or vice versa)
- Where there was an emotional connection by the human to a particular animal, that animal may have had better care
- Hidden animals – kept in small or dark places, almost as if “out of sight, out of mind”
- Significant impact on the environment, with slurry or run-off of waste, and waste covering large areas.
- Dead equines, often left lying where they had dropped and died, but also sometimes hidden in sheds or barns
- A theme that emerged from the data is that of the equine being contained. In small animal hoarding crating of animals frequently occurs. Equines were often found to be kept in small, fenced areas, or in small cubicles in sheds or barns.



This raised the question whether large animals are perceived differently to small animals and how this affects the reporting of welfare cases, or the likelihood that people are able to identify an equine or other large-animal welfare case. Seeing a herd of horses live out naturally with a lot of space is often perceived as desirable by the general public. But when looking up-close, neglect

might be visible, possibly with some horses ill or dying. This is something that can be addressed by educating the public.

How to bring about change in human behaviour

Traditionally, to try and change behaviour in animal welfare cases or in human health care, techniques are used such as telling people “not to do it”, advising and explaining, scaring, bribing, educating into submission, etc. These often don’t work or don’t have lasting effects because human behaviour change has to be intrinsic to that person.

Motivational interviewing is an intervention that has shown to be very successful in managing drug abuse, alcoholism, gambling and other addictive behaviours. It is a directive and client-centred counselling approach for eliciting behaviour change by helping clients to explore and resolve ambivalence. Using motivational interviewing in equine welfare cases to bring about behaviour changes is a very new approach to managing these cases and preventing relapses.

As part of a project, Bronwen Williams has been involved in delivering training to WHW equine officers and other staff, in a 5-day course specifically designed to use motivational interviewing when working with owners and supporting them to change behaviours in order to improve the welfare of their animals. The project underway with WHW adapts training courses that work in human health care to those that work in animal welfare. Certain behavioural and cognitive elements have been included to allow the skills to be used more specifically with those at risk of hoarding, or currently hoarding animals. The initial outcomes of the project, which was started in September, are looking promising. A full report will be written and published.

She concluded, “we know that removing animals from hoarding situations doesn’t work. We know that telling people they need to change, doesn’t work.” Although these new interventions may not work in every situation, perhaps there is some hope that more equines and the humans that are involved, will benefit in the future.

Closing address – HRH The Princess Royal (President WHW)

After various presentations and serious discussions around the topic of responsibility, HRH The Princess Royal lightened the atmosphere when starting her closing address by wondering how many husbands and fathers already think their wives and daughters are hoarders.

To the Princess, care is not an academic subject that can be taught. Care is innate. And responsibility falls in the same category. Most people inherently understand what the term means. However, there is a need to define specific responsibility in certain areas. This is where the difficulty arises because perceptions of responsibility and specific obligations in different areas may not always be exactly the same. Overall, the true responsibility to a horse will always lie with the owner.

Part of our responsibility is recognising a horse’s talent, one may even call it its personality, and realising whether a particular horse and its traits suit us.

Personalities of horses vary, and it is possible to tell if they like something or likely doing something. To racehorses, running comes naturally and is bred into them. But in other disciplines other traits may be noticeable, for example some horses genuinely like to “show off” or enjoy having an audience. This is not something that one would naturally expect from a herd animal. But for centuries, horses have been bred for their relationship with people, and this has changed their needs to a certain extent as well. Herein also lies why we are accountable for the welfare of all aspects of our horses, because we bred them to be an integral part of our lives.



HRH The Princess Royal - WHW President

The Princess pointed out the role of social media in influencing our opinions and educating us. Caution must be taken to scrutinise the source of the information and whether it is evidence-based. Social media influences our expectations. We develop expectations of perfection in many aspects – our own health, relationships, job satisfaction. And also, we have expectation of perfection in terms of what is good for a horse. But we need to allow for variation and grey areas.

Looking at the 3 F's (food, friends, freedom) which horses need to be happy and considering freedom, i.e. for horses to be allowed to live out or spend much time out in a field as possible or as is natural – she has known horses that don't like to be turned out all day. They have become used to their routine and enjoy the interaction around them, and can be found standing at the gate after 2 hours, wanting to come back in. So, our partnerships with horses have influenced the horses in many respects, as well as their like to be part of the human's life.

Another grey area is the management of risk and how to reduce it. The longer we have horses, the better we know that there cannot be a guarantee of no risks. This applies to both the animal and the handler. Horse owners will appreciate how many issues can arise alone from turning out horses in a field. So, although creating a risk-free environment is impossible, understanding the risk can help to limit it for individual scenarios in the best possible way.

Those that compete should know the rules, which were set into place to safeguard against certain risks and for the welfare of the horse, even if some rules seem inconvenient or are so complicated that often we forget why the rule is even there. This highlights some of the major work that WHW is doing – spreading information and giving education, for example on vaccination schedules.

But improving horse welfare across the entire spectrum of the horse world goes beyond competition and leisure horses, because working horses & donkeys have a huge economic and social impact in countries and communities where people rely on them to earn a living. The needs of these people drive what type of information we need to give to them in order to educate them on how to look after their horses better.

Also as the President of the Riding for the Disabled Association, The Princess Royal has seen some remarkable partnerships between humans and horses. This environment brings with it some unique challenges which one would probably not agree to under normal circumstances. But the way that these horses adapt is extraordinary, in terms of the physical challenges they are faced with, combined with the understanding that they need to behave differently around people with disabilities. This indicates that humans should not underestimate an equine's ability to make choices. Bringing a bit of humour back into her speech, the Princess pointed out that many in the audience will know from personal experience that horses are quite capable of saying "no" if they don't want to do something. It is our responsibility in such cases, to listen to what they are telling us. Horses are prepared to be our partners in a number of different ways and we as humans are extremely privileged how horses take to their roles and jobs. It is our responsibility to make sure that this partnership works as well as possible.

Therefore, the debate about responsibility is one that we should have often, to remain aware of our obligation and challenge ourselves to do our best to take it seriously. We need to make sure that if we change things, we do it for the right reasons and in the right places, for a better future.