

Code of Practice for the Welfare of Horses, Ponies, Donkeys and their Hybrids



Department of
**Agriculture and
Rural Development**

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AN ROINN
**Talmhaíochta agus
Forbartha Tuaithe**

MANNISTRIE O
**Fairms an
Kintra Fordèrin**

Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011

CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Introduction	2
Duty of Care	4
Section 1: Environment	6
Section 2: Diet	13
Section 3: Behaviour	21
Section 4: Company	22
Section 5: Health and Welfare	23
Annexes	
Annex 1– Horse Passports	28
Annex 2– Sources of Information	29

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Introduction to the Code

Owning and caring for a horse can be a source of great enjoyment but is also a big responsibility with a long-term caring and financial commitment. The Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 (“the Act”) requires you to ensure that the needs any horse, pony, donkey or mule for which you are responsible, whether on a permanent or a temporary basis are met to the extent required by good practice. For the purpose of the Act an animal’s needs include:-

- has a suitable environment to live in;
- has a healthy diet;
- is able to behave normally;
- has appropriate company, and
- is protected from pain, suffering, injury or disease.

These needs are covered in more detail in Sections 1 to 5 of this code.

A breach of a provision of the Code is not an offence in itself, but if proceedings are brought against you for a welfare offence the Court may look at whether or not you have complied with the Code in deciding whether you have committed an offence.

You should not cause any unnecessary suffering to your animal; this could constitute a serious offence under the Act. For further advice, speak to your veterinary surgeon or an experienced horse professional. Other sources of information are listed in Annex 1.

It is your responsibility to fully understand the horse’s welfare needs and what is required of you to meet those needs.

Throughout this Code of Practice the term “vet” will be used to refer to a veterinary surgeon.

In this Code “Equine” or “Equidae” is intended to cover all:

- domestic horses, ponies; and
- donkeys and hybrids (including mules).

Where the word “horse” is used in this Code, the reference applies to all equidae. If information relates to donkeys specifically, reference to donkeys will be made.

For the purpose of this Code, a “keeper” means a person who has day-to-day charge of the horse.

You will also find reference in the code to 'experienced horse professionals'. These are people who, through qualification or experience, can provide expert advice on welfare and some aspects of equine health.

Duty of Care

Under the Act animal owners and keepers are under a legal duty of care for the animals for which they are responsible on a permanent or temporary basis. An owner has ongoing responsibility for their animal even if another person is in charge of it. A parent or guardian of a child under 16 years is responsible for any animal that is cared for by the child. If an owner leaves an animal in the care of another person, it is the owner's duty to ensure the keeper is competent and has the necessary authority to act in an emergency.

Responsibility for an animal includes having an understanding of the specific health and welfare needs of the animal and having the appropriate knowledge and skills to care for the animal. Those responsible for animals will also have to comply with the legislation and should be aware of their duty of care as outlined by this Code of Practice. They should also know when to seek advice and help and who to approach.

Owning and caring for a horse is great fun and very rewarding, but it is also a big responsibility.

Before buying a horse potential owners need to consider a number of important issues to ensure that they will be able to meet their duty of care towards the horse (as described in sections 1-5). Issues that should be considered prior to acquiring a horse include:

- **Your skills and experience**

You should consider how much experience you have and whether you have the skills and knowledge to care for a horse properly. Owners must possess the required knowledge and husbandry skills to look after a horse in their care. Consideration should be given to gaining prior experience with horses via formal training courses or at licensed riding establishments.

- **Taking a horse on a short-term or long-term loan**

The responsibilities and ongoing costs of loaning a horse will be the same as owning a horse.

- **The cost of keeping a horse**

The purchase cost of a horse may be minimal compared to the ongoing costs. The ongoing costs will vary depending on the needs of the individual horse, where it is kept and what it is used for. Potential owners should draw up a budget based on their own circumstances to determine whether the ongoing costs are affordable. If you do not have your own stable and

grazing then consideration should be given to whether there is suitable livery available to meet your horse's needs in your area. You should consider costs such as feeding, bedding, stabling, livery and use of pasture, worming, veterinary fees (for both routine and emergency care), farriery etc. You should consider insuring your horse in case of unexpected health problems.

- **The type of horse that is most appropriate**

It is important to find the right animal when purchasing a horse as this can prevent many problems in the future. You should consider factors such as horse age, breed, gender and intended use. It is useful to try a number of different horses prior to purchase for the purposes of comparison and the advice of an experienced horseperson should always be sought. Before purchasing a horse you should have it examined by an independent veterinary surgeon.

- **Contingency plans in case of emergency**

A potential owner needs to consider what contingency plans they should have in place in case of emergency, for example:

- the provision for stabling and transport should emergency veterinary treatment be required;
- having the means to isolate a horse if necessary, and
- alternative arrangements for the care of the horse should the keeper become incapacitated for any reason.

These contingency arrangements should be reviewed when there is any change in the owner's, keeper's or horse's circumstances.

The needs of horses are explained in more detail in this Code, however, an individual horse may have other needs that must be met to ensure its wellbeing. **If an owner or keeper is unsure what these might be it is important that they seek advice from an appropriate source of information such as a vet, an experienced horse professional or an appropriate equine welfare organisation.**

Contact details for such organisations can be found in the, "Sources of Information" at the end of the Code of Practice.

Section 1: Environment

This section offers guidance on providing suitable place to live.

Shelter

Not all horses will need a stable/housing. Some breeds with thick coats are capable of living outdoors throughout the year, provided they can obtain shelter from the prevailing winds, summer sun and flies. As donkeys do not have waterproof coats they will always need shelter from the rain. Shelter can be natural (for example trees or hedges) or man-made (such as a field shelter) depending on the field environment and type of horse. However, where horses are of less hardy breeding (i.e. thoroughbreds), clipped, very young or elderly they may require stable accommodation/housing or other shelter to protect them from the cold and damp or very hot weather. Any horse may need stabling at short notice should they become sick or injured and provision should be made for this in advance of an emergency arising.

Pasture

The area of pasture required per horse will depend on the type of grass, ground conditions, time of year, type of horse and degree of pasture management employed. As a general rule, each horse requires approximately 0.5 – 1.0 hectares (or 1.25 to 2.5 acres) of grazing of a suitable quality if no supplementary feeding is being provided. Each donkey requires a minimum of 0.2 – 0.4 hectares (a half to one acre). A smaller area may be adequate where a horse is principally housed and grazing areas are used only for occasional turnout.

A good pasture management programme is necessary to avoid over-grazing, to aid worm control, to maintain good drainage and to control weeds. This includes, for example, picking up droppings, rotating grazing areas and where possible removing horses when the ground is very wet to prevent poaching (where the pasture is broken into wet muddy patches by the action of the horse's feet on the wet ground) and health problems.

In muddy conditions it is important that a horse has an adequately sized, well-drained area in the pasture on which to stand and lie down, and on which to be fed and watered.

Most horse pastures contain a large proportion of weeds and rough grass where horses are the only grazers. Consideration should therefore be given to grazing

sheep or cattle in horse pastures to improve sward quality and assist in reducing worm burden.

Fields should be kept clear of dangerous objects and poisonous plants.

Ragwort is toxic to horses and ingestion can result in fatal liver damage. Horses will eat cut ragwort as well as the living plant so correct disposal is essential. As cut and pulled flowering ragwort plants may still set seed, and ragwort has a 70% seed germination rate, effective disposal is a key factor in control. All ragwort species should be disposed of by extraction (to remove the root base) followed by incineration, controlled burning or removal to landfill.

Horses should not have access to hedge clippings.

Grass cuttings are not suitable for horses to eat and care should be taken that horses do not gain access to these (i.e. garden waste or cut fields). Safe hedge types for horses, ponies, donkeys and hybrids include hawthorn and hazel; trees that are suitable for use in paddocks include ash, birch, willow, sycamore, lime and poplar.

Fences should be strong enough and of sufficient height to prevent horses from escaping (for example higher fences may be required for stallions) and designed, constructed and maintained to avoid the risk of injury with no sharp projections. Gateways should be designed to allow for the easy and safe passage of horses, and gates should be fastened securely to prevent injury and escape. In some situations gates may need to be padlocked. Whilst barbed wire and sheep wire are not ideal where they are used it should be stretched tight in fields used by horses. Where plain wire is used, measures should be taken to ensure it is sufficiently visible to the horse.

The height of fences required will depend on the types of horses being contained in the field. The British Horse Society (BHS) generally recommends that fences should be 1.25m (4ft) high, more specifically:

- **Horses:** 1.08m to 1.38m (3ft 6ins to 4ft 6ins)
- **Ponies:** 1m to 1.3m (3ft 3ins to 4ft 3ins)
Lower rail (in both cases): 0.5m (1ft 6ins) above ground
- **Stallions:** 1.38m to 1.8m (4ft 6ins to 6ft)

Stallions may require a double fence line and possibly an electric fence line along the top of the paddock rail. This is to prevent aggression between occupants of different paddocks, as well as to contain the stallion within the allocated area.

Electric fences should be designed, installed and maintained so that contact with them does not cause more than momentary discomfort to the horse; all power

units should be correctly earthed. Electric fencing should be clearly visible to horses to prevent injury, with extra supervision provided until they become accustomed to it. Temporary internal sub-divisions created out of electrified tape and plastic posts provide an effective internal barrier, but these should not be used as the sole boundary fence.

When grazing a number of horses the allocation of paddocks should be considered to allow for the segregation of dominant horses if necessary. This will prevent bullying and reduce the risk of injury to sub-ordinate horses.

Stable Accommodation/Housing

Welfare aspects should be considered when constructing or altering buildings to provide housing for horses, consideration should be given to obtaining professional advice to ensure the design is fit for purpose. The main considerations are the safety and comfort of the horses, ease of access and adequate drainage and ventilation. If poorly designed or managed, stabling can contribute to the rapid spread of disease, cause injury and pose significant fire risks.

The following comments apply equally to all forms of housing including individual stables, stalls and communal barns.

- **Construction:** the building should be constructed soundly, with no exposed surfaces or projections likely to cause injury. All surfaces should be capable of being cleaned and disinfected. If surfaces are treated, non-toxic paints or non-toxic wood preservatives should be used.
- **Fixtures and fittings** such as tie rings, hay racks and water bowls should be free of sharp edges and positioned so as to avoid injury, particularly to the eyes. It is better to feed horses off the floor without the use of a haynet. However if used, haynets should be fixed at the horse's head height, allowing the horse to eat comfortably yet avoiding the risk of the horse getting its feet or head collar caught in the net when empty.
- **Head collars** should not be left on in stables. However if it is absolutely necessary they should be capable of breaking under pressure to prevent injury in the event of entanglement.
- **Floors** should be reasonably even, nonslip and designed to give good drainage, taking stable waste away from the horse.
- **Doors** should be of a suitable size for the individual horse as a guide 1.25m (4 ft) wide. The height of the door should allow the horse or pony to see out

over the door, door grills may be used. The bottom door should be capable of being securely fastened with top and bottom bolts. Stables may also have a top door which should be capable of being secured in the open position. You should be aware that shutting the top door may reduce ventilation and natural light.

- **Roofs** should be high enough to provide adequate ventilation including good air circulation. There should be a reasonable clear space (2-3 ft) to the roof above the withers of the horse in its normal standing position.
- **Light:** sufficient light is essential within all stabling both for the horse to see adequately and also to enable inspection and safe handling of horses at all times. This can include portable lighting. Light bulbs should be enclosed in safety fittings with cabling secured well out of reach.
- **Windows and ventilation slats** should provide adequate air circulation without creating draughts. Perspex or safety glass (with grilles fitted between the horse and the glass) is advisable. One window or top door should normally be open at all times.

Adequate ventilation in any equine housing is essential. Horses can develop respiratory problems if kept in housing with poor ventilation. Levels of dust within stables should be kept to a minimum and there should be a good flow of air through the buildings without unnecessary draughts.

As horses and ponies vary so greatly in size it is difficult to set an ideal size for loose boxes, barns or stables. However, the stable size should be suitable for the individual horse, as a minimum, each horse should have sufficient room to lie down, readily rise and turn around in comfort. Boxes for foaling and for mares with a foal at foot will require additional space. All passageways should be sufficiently wide to enable horses to be led safely past other horses.

As a guide the BHS minimum stable size recommendations are as follows:

- **Horses:** 3.65m x 3.65m (12ft x 12ft)
- **Large horses:** 3.65m x 4.25m (12ft x 14ft)
- **Ponies:** 3.05m x 3.05m (10ft x 10ft)
- **Large ponies:** 3.05m x 3.65m (10ft x 12ft)
- **Foaling box:** (horse): 4.25m x 4.25m (14ft x 14ft)

As a guide the Donkey Sanctuary minimum stable sizes for donkeys are as follows:

- **Mules:** 3.65m x 3.65m (12ft x 12ft)
- **Donkeys:** 3.05m x 3.05m (10ft x 10ft)
- **Large donkeys:** 3.05m x 3.65m (10ft x 12ft)

Groups of horses can be kept together in communal barns, but care should be taken to ensure that all horses get adequate access to hay, feed and water. Sufficient space should be provided to allow free movement, and to allow all the horses to lie down at the same time. Care should be taken to select groups that are compatible and aggressive horses should be segregated. Late term mares and mares with foals at foot have special requirements and it may not be appropriate to house these animals in communal barns.

Adequate and suitable bedding material is necessary in all equine accommodation to provide warmth, protection against injury and to enable the horse to lie down in comfort. Whatever bedding is used (e.g. straw, shavings, rubber stable mats etc.) it should be well managed and changed or cleaned regularly.

Fire is always a risk in stable areas. Advice should be sought from the local Fire Prevention Officer in relation to statutory requirements. Highly flammable liquid material or combustible material should not be stored in or close to stables where horses are housed. It is recommended that smoking in stable areas should be avoided.

All equipment and services (lighting units, fire extinguishers and alarm systems) should be kept clean, inspected annually by an appropriately qualified person and kept in good working order. All electrical installations at mains voltage shall be installed, maintained and periodically inspected and tested by a competent electrician. Wiring and fittings shall be inaccessible to horses, well insulated, safeguarded from rodents and properly earthed. If using extension leads or cables care should be taken to reduce the risk of injury to the horse. All metal pipe work and structural steelwork should be properly earthed. The risk of fire and electrocution can be reduced by having the whole installation protected by a residual current device (RCD).

Stabled horses should be capable of being released quickly in the event of fire or other emergency in accordance with a pre-planned emergency turnout procedure.

Tethering

Tethering is not a common practice in Northern Ireland. Tethering can be defined as securing an animal by an appropriately attached chain, to a centre point or anchorage, causing it to be confined to a desired area. Tethering is not a suitable method of long-term management of an animal, as it restricts that animal's freedom to exercise itself, to find food and water, or to escape from attacks by dogs or the extremes of hot and cold weather. It also risks an animal

becoming entangled, or injuring itself, on tethering equipment. Tethering may be useful as an exceptional short-term method of animal management (e.g. in medical cases where short-term restriction of food intake is required under veterinary advice).

When horses are tethered the need for regular supervision is paramount. Tethered horses should be inspected no less frequently than every six hours during normal waking hours, and clean fresh water should be available at all times. The term 'tethering' as it is used in the Code does not apply to horses that are stall-tied (a common method historically used for stabling cavalry horses).

Any horse that is stall-tied should receive regular exercise, unless this method is used under veterinary guidance (e.g. as part of the management of an orthopaedic condition).

Rugs

Not all horses will need a rug during inclement weather as some breeds with thick coats are capable of living outdoors throughout the year without rugs. Some of these breeds often thrive better without rugs, as rugs can sometimes be a cause of skin irritation. However, where horses are of less hardy breeding, clipped or elderly they may require a rug to help keep them warm and dry during cold spells, during wet weather or to provide protection from flies. Turnout rugs will need to be removed when the weather (particularly temperature) improves.

Rugs and hoods should be **well fitting**, of the correct size to suit the horse, of the correct type for the purpose intended and correctly fitted to prevent rubbing, hair loss, abrasions or restriction of movement. **The weight of rug must be appropriate to the weather conditions and the temperature.** Rugs should be regularly removed so the horse's body condition and general health can be checked. Ideally this should be done daily. Horses are very efficient at regulating their own temperature and over-rugging can impede this function. Care should therefore be taken to ensure horses do not become too hot as a result of wearing a rug.

Rugs should be cleaned and repaired as necessary and all fastenings kept in good working order. A spare rug should be available.

Supervision

Horses at grass should be inspected at least once a day, preferably more often. Stabled or group-housed horses should be inspected at least twice a day. Particular attention should be paid to their gait, demeanour, feet, body condition

and appetite so that early signs of disease, injury, illness or signs of parasites can be noticed and appropriate treatment promptly provided. Close examinations should be conducted at regular intervals, ideally daily, in order to identify any problems (e.g. skin conditions) that may not be apparent from a distance.

Hooves of horses should be picked out on a regular basis and at the same time examined for signs of discomfort, wounds, injury, loose shoes, impacted foreign material or anything else unusual. Horses should be groomed regularly to ensure that the coat is clean, free from wounds or parasites and to detect rug, tack or harness rubbing. The frequency required will depend on your horse's management regime and coat type. However, horses living outside should **not** be regularly groomed as this can remove natural protective oils from their coat. They should however be regularly and carefully checked over.

Section 2: Diet

This section offers guidance on providing a suitable diet.

Feed

Horses are naturally grazers who eat little and often. Their natural diet is mainly grasses, which have high roughage content. Horses should be provided with a predominantly fibre-based diet: either grass, hay, haylage or a hay replacement in order to mimic their natural feeding pattern as closely as possible. Horses should be fed an appropriate diet that reflects their needs and consideration should be given to the age, type, weight, condition, health and level of work of the individual. Feeding requirements will also vary depending on the time of year/weather conditions.

All conserved forage (hay, haylage etc.) should be of good quality. It should be clean (free from soil, debris and poisonous plants), smell fresh and be visibly free from mould and dust. Feeding forage at floor level is good for horses' respiratory health, provided the underlying ground is kept reasonably clean.

Good quality grazing may ensure an adequate intake of roughage and minerals. If grazing is inadequate, supplementary feeding may be required. Horses that are prone to laminitis may need their grazing restricted at certain times of the year. Discuss this issue with your vet if you have any concerns.

The quantity of concentrates fed to a horse as supplementary feed in addition to any roughage (e.g. grazing, hay or similar fodder) should be no more than that necessary to provide the required energy for the type and quantity of exercise performed. Feeding excessive concentrates can contribute to health problems such as gastrointestinal upset and laminitis.

The daily concentrate ration should be spread over at least two meals a day. Horses should not be fed immediately prior to or following strenuous exercise as this can lead to gastrointestinal upset.

Feed should be stored in vermin-proof containers and carefully handled to prevent spoiling and to ensure the quality of feed is maintained. Feed containers and utensils should be kept clean to discourage rodents. Contaminated, mouldy or stale leftover food and forage should not be fed to the horse and should be removed daily. Each feed should be well mixed and freshly prepared.

Where loose horses are fed in groups there should be one feeder per horse plus an extra feeding point. Two horses' lengths should be allowed between feeders to minimise the risk of injury to horses through competition for food. In certain

situations it may be necessary to feed individual horses separately to ensure they receive adequate food.

The weight and condition of every horse should be monitored regularly to avoid welfare problems. Feeding should be adjusted to maintain a stable, optimum body condition score (see Body Condition Score Charts – Page 12). Feeding requirements will vary depending on age, breed and exercise regime.

Obesity is as serious a welfare concern as under-feeding as it can lead to many health-related problems. You should contact your vet or equine nutritionist if you need to discuss the dietary requirements of your horse.

Obesity and over-eating remain major causes of laminitis. Horses that are overweight are at a high risk of developing laminitis. Laminitis may also be associated with eating excess amounts of lush grass. Grazing may need to be restricted at certain times of the year to reduce this risk.

Laminitis can also be seen in horses which are not overweight (e.g. associated with excess concentrate feeding or illness). Once a horse or pony has had laminitis it tends to be at an increased risk regardless of body condition and close attention should be paid to their diet. If you have any concerns you should contact your vet.

Obesity in donkeys can cause significant metabolic problems in addition to those referred to above. Care should be taken to ensure that donkeys do not become overweight.

A sudden change in appetite, or decrease in weight, can be a sign of ill-health and you should pay close attention to whether your horse is showing any other signs of illness. Your vet should be consulted if you have any concerns.

A horse's nutritional requirements will vary through its life and foals, pregnant mares and elderly horses in particular have special dietary requirements.

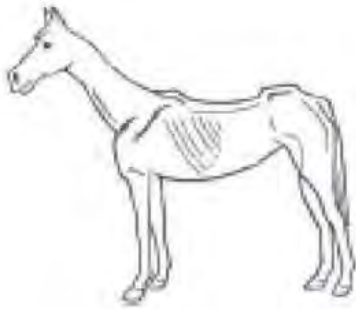
Horses should have almost constant access to forage (e.g. grass, hay, haylage) during their non-exercise hours. If a horse is stabled for long periods, forage should be provided at regular intervals to try to mimic the natural grazing pattern of horses. Any diet changes (increase in volume, change in feed or hay etc.) should be made gradually. Sudden changes can lead to gastrointestinal upsets including colic and diarrhoea and should be avoided.

Inexperienced owners or owners/keepers with any concerns about how best to feed their horse should consult an expert in the area of feeding.

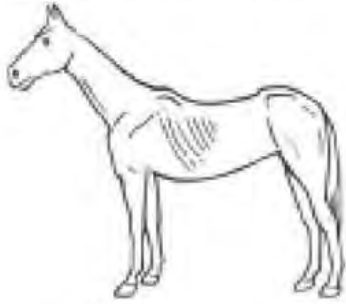
Water

When stabled or at grass horses should have continuous access to a clean supply of fresh water.

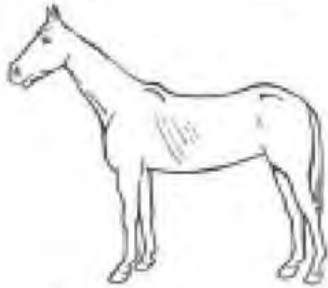
Body Condition Scoring –Horses



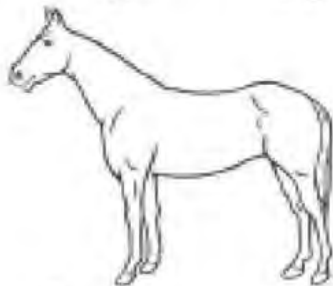
0 Very Poor



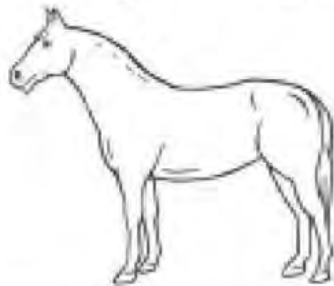
1 Poor



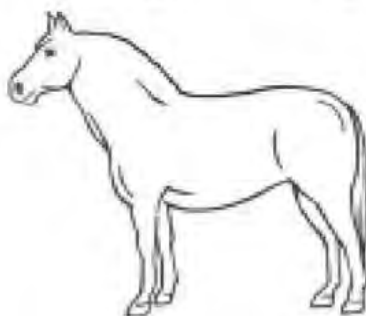
2 Moderate



3 Good



4 Fat



5 Very Fat

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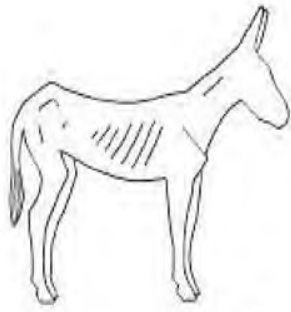
Body Condition Scoring –Horses

C/S	Pelvis	Back and Ribs	Neck
0 Very Poor	Angular, skin tight. Very sunken rump. Deep cavity under tail.	Skin tight over ribs. Very prominent and sharp backbone.	Marked ewe neck. Narrow and slack at base.
1 Poor	Prominent pelvis and croup. Sunken rump but skin supple. Deep cavity under tail.	Ribs easily visible. Prominent backbone with sunken skin on either side.	Ewe neck, narrow and slack base.
2 Moderate	Rump flat either side of back bone. Croup well defined, some fat. Slight cavity under tail.	Ribs just visible. Backbone covered but spines can be felt.	Narrow but firm.
3 Good	Covered by fat and rounded. No gutter. Pelvis easily felt.	Ribs just covered and easily felt. No gutter along the back. Backbone well covered but spines can be felt.	No crest (except for stallions) firm neck.
4 Fat	Gutter to roof of tail. Pelvis covered by fat. Need firm pressure to feel.	Ribs well covered - need pressure to feel.	Slight crest. Wide and firm.
5 Very Fat	Deep gutter to root of tail. Skin distended. Pelvis buried, cannot be felt.	Ribs buried, cannot be felt. Deep gutter along back. Back broad and flat	Marked crest very wide and firm. Fold of fat.

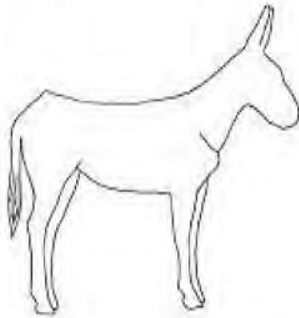
Based on the Carroll and Huntington Method

To obtain a body score, score the pelvis first, then adjust by half a point if it differs by one point or more to the back or neck.

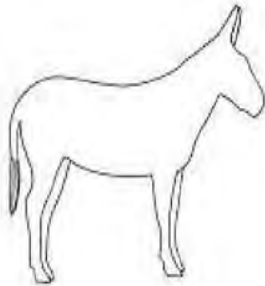
Body Condition Scoring – Donkeys



1 Poor



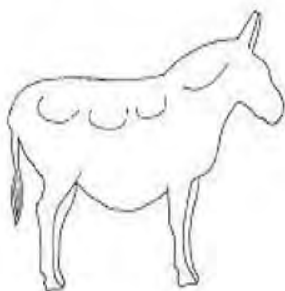
2 Moderate



3 Ideal



4 Fat



5 Obese

Fat deposits may be unevenly distributed especially over the neck and hindquarters. Some resistant fat deposits may be retained in the event of weight loss and/or may calcify (harden). Careful assessment of all areas should be made and combined to give an overall score.

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Body Condition Scoring – Donkeys

C/S	Neck and Shoulders	Withers	Ribs and Belly	Back and Loins	Hind-quarters
1 Poor	Neck thin, all bones easily felt. Neck meets shoulder abruptly, shoulder bones easily felt, angular.	Dorsal spine of withers prominent and easily felt.	Ribs can be seen from a distance and felt with ease. Belly tucked up.	Backbone prominent, can feel dorsal and transverse processes easily.	Hip bones visible and felt easily (hock and pin bones). Little muscle cover. May be cavity under tail.
2 Moderate	Some muscle development overlying bones. Slight step where neck meets shoulders.	Some cover over dorsal withers Spinous processes felt but not prominent.	Ribs not visible but can be felt with ease.	Dorsal and transverse processes felt with light pressure. Poor muscle development either side midline.	Poor muscle cover on hindquarters, hip bones felt with ease.
3 Ideal	Good muscle development, bones felt under light cover of muscle/fat. Neck flows smoothly into shoulder, which is rounded.	Good cover of muscle/fat over dorsal spinous processes, withers flow smooth into back.	Ribs just covered by light layer of fat/muscle, ribs can be felt with light pressure. Belly firm with good muscle tone and flattish outline.	Cannot feel individual spinous or transverse processes. Muscle development either side of midline is good.	Good muscle cover in hindquarters, hip bones rounded in appearance, can be felt with light pressure.
4 Fat	Neck thick, crest hard shoulder covered in even fat layer.	Withers broad bones felt with firm pressure.	Ribs dorsally only felt with firm pressure, ventral ribs may be felt more easily. Overdeveloped belly.	Can only feel dorsal and transverse processes with firm pressure. Slight crease along midline.	Hindquarters rounded, bones felt only with firm pressure. Fat deposits evenly placed

5 Obese	Neck thick, crest bulging with fat and may fall to one side. Shoulder rounded and bulging with fat.	Withers broad, unable to feel bones.	Large, often uneven fat deposits covering dorsal and possible ventral aspect of ribs. Ribs not palpable. Belly pendulous in depth and width.	Back broad, unable to feel spinous or transverse processes. Deep crease along midline bulging fat either side.	Cannot feel hip bones, fat may overhang either side of tail head, fat often uneven and bulging.
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Half scores can be assigned where donkeys fall between scores. Aged donkeys can be hard to condition score due to lack of muscle bulk and tone giving thin appearance dorsally with dropped belly ventrally, while overall condition may be reasonable.

Section 3: Behaviour

This section offers guidance on behaviour.

Exercise

Horses and ponies require adequate exercise, or freedom to exercise and this will require time and effort from the horse owner or keeper. Most stabled horses will benefit from daily turnout in the field to allow them to graze and socialise with other horses. This may have the added benefit of alleviating the risk of stable vices. If turnout is not feasible, stabled horses should receive appropriate exercise regularly, unless contrary to veterinary advice.

Training

Horses require calm, consistent and sympathetic handling by competent people.

Horses respond best to a firm but gentle approach. If you are unsure how to best handle your horse, advice should be sought from an experienced horse professional. Professional help should be sought as soon as any behavioural issue is encountered. Horses sense fear in humans and small problems can quickly escalate if not addressed swiftly.

It is an offence to cause an animal unnecessary suffering therefore any discipline should be appropriate, timely, reasonable and proportionate.

Any restraint method used to assist normal management or treatment of the horse should be the most mild, effective method available and should be applied by a competent person only for the minimum period necessary. Sedatives must only be used if prescribed by a vet.

Section 4: Company

This section offers guidance on socialisation for your horse.

Socialisation

Horses are herd animals and prefer to live in social groups. Ideally they should be socialised with members of their own species but, where this is not possible, other animals may be used to provide company. They also enjoy human company so, if kept on their own, they require more frequent human contact and supervision. Donkeys have particular socialisation needs and can become ill if separated from a companion.

Horses should always be treated as individuals even when kept in large groups. When forming new groups care should be taken to minimise fighting and stress, particularly when horses are to be mixed together for the first time. This risk can be reduced by increasing the space allowance or by penning the new animal close to the existing group for a short period and/or removing back shoes of all animals during the introduction period. The group should be closely monitored after a new animal has been introduced.

When living in groups, horses will develop a pecking order. It is important to be aware of bullying and care needs to be taken to ensure that all the horses are getting the feed and water they require. Individuals in larger groups are likely to encounter more competition for food, water, shelter and social position. Measures should be taken to identify individuals that are not coping well and to provide for those with higher maintenance needs.

Aggressive individuals may not be suitable for mixing in fields or communal barns. Incompatible individuals should be separated. These may include entire males (colts, stallions) and “rigs” (a stallion with un-descended testicles or a horse which has been incompletely castrated).

Mares heavily in foal or with foal at foot may need to be separated from other horses. Care should be taken to ensure the needs of these mares are adequately met.

As a general rule the more horses that are kept, the more time, effort and resources are required to safeguard their welfare.

Stallions have special requirements and may not be suitable for turnout with other horses. It is important that stallions receive adequate exercise and environmental stimulation.

Section 5: Health & Welfare

This section offers guidance on the health and welfare of your horse.

Illness

Everyone responsible for the supervision of horses should be able to recognise signs of ill health and have a basic knowledge of equine first aid. It is also important that owners and keepers have access to a vet to diagnose or treat any illness, injury or disease. Owners/keepers should have their vet's contact details easily available, including out of hours information to enable timely access to veterinary assistance should an emergency occur. The Horse's passport should be readily accessible; otherwise some treatments may not be available.

Owners and keepers of horses should be able to recognise the normal behaviour of their horses and recognise the signs that indicate poor health. These include:

- Change in appetite or drinking habits. (In donkeys, loss of appetite can be life threatening in a very short period of time so veterinary advice should be sought immediately).
- Change in droppings or signs of diarrhoea.
- Change in demeanour or behaviour.
- Change in weight (either increase or decrease).
- Change in coat/foot condition.
- Any signs of pain or discomfort, including reluctance to move, pawing at the ground, rolling, increased rate of respiration and sweating.
- Reluctance to stand or inability to stand.
- Any sign of injury or lameness, including puncture wounds.
- Any signs of disease, such as discharge from the eye/ear/nose, congestion of membranes/conjunctiva, or coughing or breathing difficulties.

This list is not exhaustive and any change in your horse's behaviour should alert you to the possibility that it might be ill. If you think that there is anything wrong with your horse, contact your veterinary practice.

When a horse becomes unwell, the cause of this deterioration should be identified and immediate remedial action taken. Veterinary advice should be obtained if the horse appears to be ill or in pain and the cause is not clear or if initial first aid treatment is not effective. In the case of foot problems, advice should be obtained in the first instance from a Vet who may, if necessary, recommend a farrier to assist. Advice from the vet or farrier should be followed diligently.

Routine Health Care

A parasite control programme should be put in place following consultation with a vet or other suitably qualified person; this may include the use of wormers, and appropriate faecal worm egg counts. Careful pasture management including the rotation of grazing and dung collection is an important part of an effective parasite control programme.

There should be adequate control of infectious and contagious disease by a programme agreed with a vet, which will include appropriate hygiene and isolation procedures and vaccination.

When a new horse enters premises, the horse should be isolated before being introduced to the rest of the herd. As a minimum, this should mean that the new horse is not turned out with other horses, and is stabled in a quiet and separate part of the yard. The horse should not be allowed direct contact with other horses during this period, and separate equipment should be used in the grooming and care of the new horse. This period of isolation is to allow the horse to develop any clinical signs of disease that may be incubating at the time of arrival and thus protect the other horses on the yard from becoming infected.

The period of isolation and any testing for infectious diseases should be determined in consultation with your vet.

If a horse on any premises is ill with an infectious disease, your vet should be consulted as to what measures are needed to try to prevent the spread of the disease to other animals. In general, measures should be taken to isolate affected animals, prevent sharing of equipment between different horses, wash hands and possibly change clothes between caring for healthy and suspect animals. Disinfectant footbaths between stables should always be frequently refreshed.

In general, all horses should be vaccinated against tetanus as horses are very susceptible to this condition. Horses can also be vaccinated against infectious diseases such as equine herpes virus (respiratory and abortion form only) and equine influenza. You should discuss with your vet what vaccinations are most appropriate for your horse as this will depend on its age and use.

In-foal mares are at risk from infection with equine herpes virus which can cause abortion. Equine herpes virus is common in young horses thus pregnant mares should be separated from young horses.

Teeth should be inspected by a vet or trained equine dental technician at least once a year, and rasped or otherwise treated if necessary. Horses with worn or

abnormal teeth are unable to chew their food properly which leads to poor digestion and they may experience dental pain. Owners and keepers should look out for signs of this problem, such as: half-chewed food dropping out of the mouth; poor condition and lack of energy; and abnormal mouth movements when ridden. Older horses may require special dental requirements and may need to have their teeth checked more than once a year.

Every horse owner and keeper should have some understanding of the care of a horse's feet and the need to treat lameness promptly and effectively. Feet should be trimmed regularly by a competent farrier and attention should be paid to their growth and balance. A horse should not be expected to work at a level above that which the hooves are capable of, whether shod or unshod. If horses are used unshod they will need to be carefully managed, and receive regular hoof care which ensures their use on difficult surfaces does not cause them to become sore and lame.

In the main, horses ridden or driven on roads or hard, rough surfaces will need to be regularly shod by a competent. Loose shoes should receive prompt attention from a competent farrier, (there is no registration of farriers in NI) to prevent possible injury. Hooves should be trimmed or re-shod as advised by the competent farrier, which should usually be every 4-8 weeks. The frequency of hoof trimming will depend on various factors including health, nutrition, age and type of work.

Flies can cause a great deal of irritation to horses, particularly during the summer, and can introduce infection to wounds so an appropriate treatment from a vet should be used. Midges can also be a source of irritation during the spring and summer and can cause sweet itch (an allergic skin condition). Consideration should be given to preventative fly and midge control through the use of fly repellents, fly rugs or masks and, for horses sensitive to fly or midge bites, stabling at dawn and dusk when flies and particularly midges are most active. If used, fly rugs or masks should be properly fitted to avoid rubbing and slipping.

Breeding

If you decide to breed from your mare, there are a number of considerations to be taken into account. You should always consider whether your mare is a suitable candidate for breeding (e.g. age, conformation, temperament, etc). In addition, mares have special requirements during pregnancy, foaling and the post-foaling period and you should make sure you are aware of these before breeding your mare. The care of a young foal can be expensive and requires a large investment of time. You should consider whether you are prepared for this and can ensure a good future for the foal before breeding your mare.

Tack and Harness

Tack and harness should be correctly fitted, preferably by a qualified saddler or harness fitter. Regular checks should be carried out to ensure that the fit of tack and harness has not changed through routine use or change in body condition. Equipment should be regularly cleaned and maintained in good order to ensure comfort, safety and effectiveness.

Boots and bandages, if used should be suitable for the purpose, correctly fitted to avoid discomfort or injury and only left on for the minimum time necessary.

Transporting Horses

The transportation of horses and ponies should always be as safe and stress free as possible and in accordance with current rules and regulations in the **Welfare of Animals (Transport) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 (as amended)**. Guidance on this is available at

<http://www.dardni.gov.uk/index/publications/pubs-dard-animal-health/pubs-animal-health-and-welfare-woadt-general-wato-guidance.htm>

It is essential that the vehicle used for transporting horses for any length of journey is safe, is in good working order, has a suitable floor, and provides suitable support and space for the horses being transported.

Horses should not be transported unless they are in a good state of health (unless they are travelling for veterinary treatment).

Water, feed and rest should be offered to horses at suitable intervals and should be appropriate in quality and quantity to the horse (s) being transported. The transport of foals should be considered carefully to safeguard the welfare of both foal and dam.

Care of older or ill horses

As horses become older their needs may become greater and they may well require increased supervision and additional veterinary care. When a horse reaches the end of its active working life, or is very elderly, consideration should be given to whether the horse can be provided with a good quality of life in retirement. Owners have a responsibility to ensure that they or whoever is entrusted with the care of such a horse is fully aware of the needs of that horse.

Euthanasia

Where, in the opinion of a vet, a horse is significantly suffering, has not responded to treatment for a serious injury or condition involving significant pain, has a disease or injury from which there is no prospect of recovery and for which no treatment is available, or where a horse is in such a condition that it would be inhumane to keep it alive, the animal should be humanely destroyed without delay by a vet or a suitably qualified, experienced and equipped person. The horse's welfare must always come first. Therefore, in the interests of the horse, owners should give the issue their full consideration well before the time comes to make a decision to prevent the horse experiencing unnecessary suffering.

ANNEX 1: Horse Passports

Since 2005 it has been a legal requirement (the Horse Passports Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2004) for all horses and ponies (and other forms of equidae) in Northern Ireland to have a passport identifying the animal.

From March 2010, new regulations on the identification of equidae have been in operation. These require all foals born after the 1st July 2009 and older horses not previously identified to be micro chipped by a vet and the number inserted into the passport. For foals, all applications must be submitted by the end of the year of their birth or within six months of birth, whichever is later.

Furthermore, from July 2009 the passport must accompany the horse during all movements with a few exceptions most notably when moved on foot or in an emergency situation. Owners and keepers with primary responsibility for the horse (e.g. full livery yards or transporters) must ensure that the horse is correctly identified before accepting the animal into their care and make the passport available for inspection.

One of the purposes of horse passports is to record all medicines that each horse receives. It is therefore essential that the passport is available whenever your vet treats your horse so he/she can record the medicines given. If the passport isn't available then the vet may not be able to administer some medicines. Some medications are dangerous to human health if the horse subsequently enters the food chain at the end of its life. If the passport is not available then the vet may not administer such substances. If the horse is given one of these medicines, your vet must ensure that section IX (which states that the animal is not intended for slaughter for human consumption) has been signed by the owner/the owner's representative or the keeper. This means that the horse can never enter the human food chain and you should think carefully about what the implications of this decision will mean at the end of your horse's life. You should discuss this with your vet if you have any questions.

ANNEX 2: Sources of Information

The structure and relevant contact details for enforcement of the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 is set out in the DARD web site at the following link:

[Enforcement for the Welfare of Animals Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2011](#)

Legislation

Links to relevant legislation

- [Welfare of Animals Act \(Northern Ireland\) 1972](#)
- [Welfare of Animals Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2011](#)
- [Noxious Weeds \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1977](#)
- [The Horse Passports Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2010](#)
- [The Welfare of Animals \(Transport\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2006](#)
- [Council Regulation \(EC\) No 1/2005 on the Protection of animals during transport and related operations](#)
- Riding Establishments (Northern Ireland) 1980 - copies of these regulations are available to view at local libraries or to purchase at: [TSO Shop](#)

Websites of relevant organisations

- [www.aht.org.uk](#)
- [www.bluecross.org.uk](#)
- [www.beva.org.uk](#)
- [www.beta-uk.org](#)
- [www.bhs.org.uk](#)
- [www.bva.co.uk](#)
- [www.crosskennanlane.org.uk/](#)
- [www.dardni.gov.uk](#)
- [http://www.equinecouncilni.com/](#)
- [www.eventingireland.com](#)
- [www.equinegrasssickness.co.uk](#)
- [www.hsa.org.uk](#)
- [www.horsesportireland.ie](#)
- [http://idhsni.com](#)

- www.irishsporthorse.com
- www.irishponysociety.ie
- www.itba.ie
- www.nihorseboard.org
- www.newc.co.uk
- www.nishetlandponygroup.co.uk
- www.niwha.net
- www.npsarea32.co.uk
- www.redwings.org.uk
- <http://www.sjai-ur.com/>
- www.uspca.co.uk
- www.thedonkeysanctuary.org.uk
- www.vetni.co.uk
- www.worldhorsewelfare.org
- www.theragworthub.co.uk