



HARTPURY EQUINE

Suitably Mounted Hartpury Loan Horse Policy

APPROVAL & REVIEW CYCLE		
Policy Owner/Reviewer	Assistant Equine Director	July 2025
Approved By	Exec	July 2025
Interim-Review	No	-
Next Review Date		July 2026

Introduction

What constitutes a suitable match between horse and rider has become a much-debated topic, fuelled by increased consideration of equine welfare aligned to the equine industries social licence to operate. Implementing this policy is aimed to ensure good horse welfare, a positive experience for riders and potentially protecting social license to operate. Yet, this is a very sensitive issue, and the human wellbeing requires careful consideration, both of riders whose suitability is in question, and of staff or those who need to have difficult conversations. Hartpury will carefully plan for this in advance to optimise wellbeing of both the horse and rider and communicate carefully and clearly ahead of events to create clear expectations. It is recommended that staff seek support from someone with experience in managing this issue, or from a mental health professional should they feel necessary (ask the Suitably Mounted group for support if needed).

Ultimately, matching a horse and rider successfully will result in a positive experience to all parties, and in the context of Hartpury as an educational environment, enable the meeting of relevant learning requirements.

1. Purpose and Intention

The purpose and intention of this policy is to promote high standards of welfare, health and safety and a positive experience for riders and horses.

2. Scope

This policy focuses on ridden work using the Hartpury loan horse population¹, including timetabled ridden sessions as part of Further and Higher Education curriculum as well wider opportunities for riding such as riding school, Equestrian Club, CPD provision (such as BHS training) and volunteering to exercise loan horses.

While this policy focuses on the Hartpury Loan Horse population, our student and staff liveries are obliged by the Hartpury Horse Charter to ensure they engage with evidence-based practice. This for example includes that a rider's weight (including riding equipment but not tack) would not be more than 15% of the bodyweight of the horse.

We recommend that individuals riding their own horses (or those they are directly responsible for) or visitors engaging in commercial activity at Hartpury (such as weekend competition) align to this policy (alongside relevant governing body requirements).

3. What do we mean by suitability?

In the context of this policy, 'suitability' refers to the appropriate matching of both the horse and rider to each other in the context of the requirements of the ridden activity (such as the learning outcomes of the associated module / unit of study). This requires the consideration of the capability, capacity, as well as physical characteristics (such as weight and height) of both the horse and rider, in the context of the aims of the ridden session.

¹ The Hartpury Loan Horse population is a group of horses who are loaned to or owned by Hartpury for use in relevant horse related activities. An externally owned loan horse will have a signed loan agreement.

4. Assessing the suitability of loan horses and riders

While assessing the suitability of a horse and rider combination is not a linear approach, for the benefit of this written document, consideration of assessing the horse, the rider and then the combination is documented.

4.1 Loan horses

The loan horse population is a group of horses sourced to support students in accessing horses to underpin learning as part of programme of study, as well as in extracurricular opportunities. This includes ridden and ground schooling exercise, alongside ground based practical situations (although this policy focuses on the ridden activities). Loan Horses are chosen to give students a wide variety of high quality, industry relevant horses to learn with.

4.1.1 Loan Horse selection.

Selection is led by the Yard Manager, who would normally seek and assess horses which align to the following criteria:

- **Healthy** – each horse will be assessed in relation to its physical ability to engage in the associated workload. Veterinary advice will always be followed in relation to exercise-based activities of an individual horse.
- **Age** – 4 years plus (as of 1st September of the academic year). There is no upper age limit providing the horse meets other requirements.
- **Height** – 15hh to 17hh although exceptions will be made for a small number of horses depending upon the individual horse and wider mix of the horse population.
- **Experience / ability** – Each horse is assessed in relation to both their ridden and non-ridden behaviour, capability and experience. As a result, the horse is categorised in relation to the relevant BHS stage for both flat work and jumping. All horses are required to be calm and sensible (aligning to the ISES first principles²), both in ridden and non-ridden environments. They should be able to hack and engage in ground-based exercise. Less experienced and more complex horses will be considered on an individual basis. The assessment of an individual horse is under continuous review.

While these criteria may apply to an individual horse, selection does consider the balance required across the Loan Horse population. For example, it is likely that a spread of horses of different heights / weights / ability will be needed to support ridden activities due to the diversity of these elements within the rider population. Collectively, the loan horse population needs to support a range of experience for students from the equivalent of BHS stage one through to BHS stage four.

All loan horses are required to meet the criteria specified as part of the Council Licence which is available here: [Licence Inspection Form.pdf](#)

4.1.2 Loan Horse allocation

Allocation is completed by a member of the Equine team, usually the Senior Instructor. The following horse specific factors are considered:

- **The requirement of the ridden session** – this will be matched with the level of experience of the loan horse.

² <https://www.equitationsscience.com/ises-training-principles>

- **Individual horse workload** - Workload is defined within the current approved council licence and is subject to change annually. At the time of approval of this policy, the agreed workload is normally up to 3 hours per day, including a maximum of 2 hours exercise based, with at least an hour break between the two. Individual variations made to this will be depending upon the individual circumstances, considering a horse first approach.
- **The weight of the horse** – On the 5-point body condition scoring system developed by Carroll & Huntingdon a healthy weight for a working horse would normally be 2.5 to 3 depending on the work being done. The condition (weight) of the horse will be matched suitably to the weight of the rider (see below).

4.2 The rider

All riders of loan horses will undergo an initial riding assessment against an agreed set of criteria, which may be part of the entry criteria for the riding related activity (such as a certain unit or module which includes riding). The criteria may vary depending upon the nature of the activity (for example, criteria for the HE Equitation module is different to the criteria to hack a loan horse). Criteria which are used in the assessment of all riders include:

- **Experience / ability:** As part of the rider assessment, riders are categorised from level 1 – 4 (in line with BHS stages). The categorisation of a rider will be matched to that of a horse. So, for example a level 1 rider would normally ride a level 1 or 2 horse, but not a level 3 or 4 horse. A level 4 rider can ride any level of horse.
- **Rider weight** - Hartpury commits to matching a horse and rider combination in line with research relating to rider weight³. Riders will be required to engage in their weight being assessed as part of an initial riding assessment and then monitored. The rider weight will include rider clothing and equipment⁴, but not horse tack and equipment.

Allocation according to weight: Allocation of the rider to the horse will normally be based on a maximum weight of 15% of the horse's bodyweight (in addition to the other factors outlined).

Student maximum weight: There is a maximum weight limit of 13.5 stone / 86kg (not including tack but this does include riding equipment such as hat, footwear etc.). Applicants and students engaging in loan horse ridden sessions will be required to demonstrate compliance with this. The maximum limit is there to ensure Hartpury can provide a sufficient range of horses for the taught provision.

³ Research produced by the Saddle Research Trust and Animal Health Trust with leading equine professionals, scientists and researchers advised that horses should only be carrying 10- 20% of their own optimum bodyweight when being ridden (including the clothing and tack used). If carrying over 20%, there is a substantial effect on the horse's gait, behaviour, soundness and welfare in response to rider weight.

⁴ Please see the Equine Handbook for details regarding rider equipment and clothing. [The Equine Handbook 25.pdf](#)

Hartpury adheres strictly to GDPR guidelines to ensure the privacy and protection of student information. Personal data is only collected in line with our General Privacy Notice (available on our website).

In relation specifically to data held under this policy, the data is held for the period of time a student is registered as riding at Hartpury, whether for education, sport or recreation use, with the information deleted at the end of each academic year. The information is held under the processing principle of legitimate interests.

- **Rider height** – at present, there is limited research to inform rider height in relation to horse allocation. However, it is highly likely that a very tall rider in relation to the horse, is likely to cause challenges for both the horse and the rider. Current practice does not indicate a minimum or maximum height for individual riders, but consideration is given to the height of the rider in relation to the height of the horse during the allocation process.

A riding assessment will consist of riding a suitable horse on the flat, in all three paces, showing sitting trot and a light seat position. All riders should be as a minimum established BHS stage 1 level and or Pony Club C+ test. Riding activities may have further requirements depending upon the nature of the activity.

Prior to the ride assessment people will have their individual weights taken privately. A hat check will be carried out to ensure they meet the required standards^{5 6}. The individual will receive feedback from the assessor on the day, which will also give them the opportunity to discuss their feedback and ask any questions. If a rider does not meet the requirements, an alternative option of engaging with horses will be discussed (see section 4.3).

Instructors will continually be re-assessing a rider against relevant criteria and share changes with the Senior Instructor or equivalent senior member of equine staff.

This feedback from the instructors will be given to the tutors so they can share this information with the riders. This gives the rider a clear understanding of where they are and how they can develop and progress with their riding.

4.3 Other factors to be considered

There are a number of factors which will be considered alongside the above, including:

- **Availability of loan horses** – while every effort will be made to make a suitable horse and rider match, should there not be the appropriate horse available within the agreed guidelines, a horse first approach will be taken and a ridden session may be postponed, or changed to a different format (such as using a horse simulator or ground based scenario).
- **Additional factors**⁷ - The staff member allocating the horse and rider combination may also consider the following:

⁵ As published in the Equine Handbook – [The Equine Handbook 25.pdf](#)

⁶ If we have an applicant that has passed their BHS stage 1 or their Pony Club C+ test in the last 18 months we would not necessarily need to complete a physical ride assessment on campus. They would need to provide evidence of their certificates and produce a video of them riding recently. They would also need to confirm they meet the weight limit.

⁷ These were adapted from guidance 'Options for Organisations' released by the UK suitably mounted group.

- If the horse is under seven or over sixteen years of age
 - If the horse is over or under weight
 - If the horse has a history of musculoskeletal pain (e.g. needs joints injected, has had past back pain, has PSSM, etc) OR horse is not fit at present
 - Rider experience and history
 - Workload is intense (e.g. over an hour in duration and requiring strength or stamina)
 - Weather conditions are likely to put additional strain on the horse (e.g. it is particularly hot)
- **Feedback from the instructor / rider** – While every effort is made to match a horse and rider successfully, feedback from the instructor and rider will be used to provide further information to guide the allocation process, both in a session and for subsequent sessions. Our instructors regularly take part in training and CPD sessions which helps to ensure the best match for horse and rider.
 - **If a rider does meet the entry riding criteria** – if a rider does not meet the riding assessment requirements for an academic course or module, they are offered an alternative course (providing they meet the relevant entry criteria).

If a rider does not meet the riding assessment requirements there is the opportunity to ride at other venues.

If a rider expresses interest in eventually meeting riding requirements, support can be offered in a respectful and empowering way:

- Referral to Health Professionals: Nutritionists, personal trainers, or GPs who specialize in supportive, non-judgmental care.
- Inclusive Fitness Programs: Local or online programs designed for people of all sizes and abilities.
- Goal-Oriented Riding Plans: Some stables offer long-term plans that include groundwork, fitness goals, and eventual riding.

Being told you can't ride can be disappointing. Offering emotional support is just as important:

- Private, Respectful Communication: Always deliver the message in a one-on-one, compassionate setting.
- Peer Support Groups: Online or local communities for plus-size riders or horse lovers.
- Positive Messaging: Reinforce that this is about safety, not judgment, and that their love for horses is still valid and welcome.

The Wellbeing Team can provide support to students to cope with disappointment following a decision of being unable to ride as well as help with healthy eating advice. Staff can encourage students to seek support using the daily (Monday to Friday) wellbeing and health drop-ins held in the Wellbeing Centre. Students who may not wish to use the internal

services are encouraged to use the Student Assistance Programme. This is a 24/7 confidential helpline with the opportunity for online and face-to-face appointments.

FREEDOM OF SPEECH

As part of this policy, Hartpury reaffirms its commitment to the principles of freedom of speech and academic freedom, in accordance with the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 and guidance from the Office for Students (OfS). Hartpury will take all reasonably practicable steps to secure the right to express lawful views and engage in open debate without fear of censorship or institutional discipline for staff, students, and visiting speakers. In addition, this policy prohibits the use of non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) in any situation that would prevent staff from speaking out about misconduct, harassment, or other matters of public interest.

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

As with all Hartpury policies and procedures, due care has been taken to ensure that this policy is appropriate to all members of staff and students regardless of their age, disability, ethnicity, gender, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation and transgender status.

The policy will be applied fairly and consistently whilst upholding Hartpury's commitment to providing equality to all. If any employee or student feels that this or any other policy does not meet this aim, please contact the HR Department (staff) or an academic tutor (student).

Hartpury is committed towards promoting positive mental health by working towards the MINDFUL EMPLOYER Charter, holds the Student Minds University Mental Health accreditation and has signed the AoC Mental Charter. Hartpury aims to create a culture of support within the workplace where employees can talk about mental health problems without the fear of stigma or discrimination.