

Education

During the year, we continued to set professional standards through a world-renowned education programme. Our network of Registered Instructors and Approved Centres delivered millions of riding lessons and held hundreds of training events to improve the level of equestrian knowledge and standards thereby improving the well-being of all horses. We held more than 650 examination days in the UK and Ireland, examining over 7,000 candidates.

As part of our commitment to ensuring that the BHS education system remains the best in the world, we reviewed and rewrote our strategic direction and we restructured. We consulted across the industry and we started to increase our marketing initiatives in order to reach more candidates. We developed a number of new partnerships with more organisations, allowing us to increase the support and development to more horse owners and riders to ensure we can improve the care of horses and ponies throughout the UK.

BRC

BRC Championships continue to go from strength to strength and 2015 saw the introduction of a new Winter Intermediate Championships. By the end of 2015, BRC final membership numbers stood at 34,522 members with 525 clubs and centres -an increase of 6.24% on the 2014.

Following a successful pilot programme, the BHS Hoof Participation Project was launched. The aim of the project is to encourage horse owners and riders to become more engaged with the aim of increasing their commitment to riding or horse ownership. Participants are encouraged to take part in the BHS recreational qualifications. The feedback has been extremely positive with centres welcoming the increased involvement with the BHS.

At the end of 2015 there were 867 BHS Approved Centres. This is a year on year decrease of 28. We are still removing centres that we can no longer support because they do not meet BHS standards. The benefits, which are offered to BHS Approved Centres, continue to develop and seven proprietor conferences were held across the country. Work has also been undertaken to ensure that our centres are represented at all levels of government. The BHS has contributed to three government consultations and reviews raising awareness of the challenges that are faced in relation to business rates and animal licences.

Membership

In 2015 The British Horse Society family increased by 6,567 members to 90,546- a growth of 7.8%. Members enjoy great benefits and an exciting calendar of BHS events as well as supporting our many important charitable activities.

Fundraising

In response to the current horse crisis, we launched one of the UK's largest castration programmes through the BHS 2015 Castration Clinic Appeal. We worked closely with our equine partners to deliver successful clinics and reduce the future suffering of horses. We will continue with this work in 2016.

The work of our Fundraising Team supports our essential charity work from welfare, safety and education to the campaigning programmes of our Access and Welfare Teams.

Across the UK every day, our Welfare Team receives calls about abandoned horses and ponies or those that, through indiscriminate breeding, have become unwanted. During the year the BHS welfare team helped more than 4,000 horses in need of assistance. Donations to our welfare work continue to rise as we find ourselves responding to an ever-increasing demand for the services of our welfare officers.

In 2015 the BHS Instructors Scholarship was launched with legacy support.

At the heart of our education work is the need to inspire young people through the programmes we deliver. Part of our work involved developing an understanding of how the BHS can help disadvantaged young people benefit from basic engagement with horses. We are looking forward to developing this work further in 2016. Finally, we are grateful for all the support, which has come through from donations to help the 'Paths for Communities' programme. These gifts have allowed us to make a lasting difference by protecting many routes for both riders and walkers across the UK. We are extremely grateful for all the support we receive from our volunteers and development team.

The work of the BHS is also funded by income generated from those elements of our work where a fee is charged. During 2015 our charitable work gained increased support and interest with a percentage growth of membership of 7.8 per cent for the year. Exam fees and Centre Approval fees also helped to generate income to fund the services and benefits provided to the public.

Access

As always, during 2015 we actively supported our Access Officers and Affiliated Equestrian Access Groups to protect existing equestrian routes and to secure new routes.

During the year we established the British Horse Society Paths for Communities Fund with £25k to provide multi-user routes in Scotland and Northern Ireland and Bridleways and Restricted Byways in England and Wales. We received bids of £14k, which will enable schemes in excess of £66k to proceed. New bridleways were created in Hertfordshire and Somerset.

These important initiatives will continue during 2016.

The Development Team

The BHS Development Team plays a vital role throughout the UK and British Isles. We support members and volunteers locally in the English Regions, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Isle of Man, the Channel Islands and the Republic of Ireland.

The Development Team deploys all the elements of the BHS in the field. Regional and National Managers are often the first point of contact with the Society for both members and non-members which allows the team to concentrate on developing good working relationships with a diverse range of people in the equine community. This will include members of the public, colleagues, and volunteers, show organisers, riding school and livery yard proprietors, instructors and trainers and other organisations whose work contributes to the objectives of the Society.

Volunteers

Each and every volunteer is valued by the BHS. Some volunteer a day a year, while others devote hours on a regular basis, or indeed provide full-time support. We want to express our gratitude to each and every one of our volunteers.

Welfare

In 2015 the BHS castration appeal was launched in order to raise money to fund a national programme of castration clinics and proactively contribute to tackling the equine overpopulation crisis. Towards the end of the year the first clinics took place and more than 200 colts were gelded and thus removed from the gene pool.

Our UK network of volunteer welfare officers helped over four thousand horses and ponies in need of urgent assistance, in what was a particularly busy year. We were pleased to recruit and train approximately 40 new officers many of whom are covering areas where there were previously vacancies; they will join our existing 200 welfare officers.

The BHS and RSPCA collaboration in the North East of England continues to work well with the BHS providing initial visits for all horse welfare concerns reported to the RSPCA in the area. The BHS played a very active role in a coalition of charities who successfully campaigned for the introduction of the Control of Horses Act (2015).

The BHS Ragwort Toolkit was also launched in 2015. The toolkit is a result of work that took place in association with Defra to address the lack of knowledge about ragwort and additionally to enable those with concerns about ragwort to utilise the correct route and legislation to address the problem.

In October, Aintree Racecourse hosted the BHS Welfare Conference- "Unlocking the Secrets of Horse Behaviour". The event was completely sold out with delegates enjoying informative presentations from a world renowned group of experts including keynote speaker Dr Joe Pagan of Kentucky Equine Research. A unique pictorial guide to correct tethering was produced which is now being used by many other organisations, including local authorities, and has been exceptionally well-received.

Safety

The key focus of BHS Safety in 2015 was the BHS Riding and Road Safety Test. The small team became responsible of the training of trainers and assessors and more than 20 training days were held nationwide. In 2016 significant changes will be made to the test and a great deal of work took place in preparation for this.

The BHS Safety Conference took place at the Royal Veterinary College in Hertfordshire and focussed on the subject of fire and horses. The very well attended conference covered a wide range of topics from safe yard design to the effects of smoke inhalation and fire on horses. A great deal of data was collected, and advice given out via the website www.horseaccidents.org.uk where anyone can report accidents or near misses involving horses.