

BHS Stage 1 Complete

Stage 1 overview

Start your journey to learn more about horses, whatever your career goal. Stage 1 qualifications are the best place to begin.

You will learn:

- The basics of looking after horses.
- Horse behaviour and welfare.
- Basic riding skills.

How to achieve the Stage 1 Complete

The Stage 1 Complete qualification is awarded upon completion of the following:

- Stage 1 Care
- Stage 1 Ride

Age range

13 years and above.

How to train for the BHS Stage 1 assessments

We recommend you train at a BHS Approved Centre or with a BHS Accredited Professional Coach.

[Find a BHS Approved Centre](#)
[Coach](#)

[Find a BHS Accredited Professional](#)

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**Facebook requires users to be a minimum age of 13*

Skills Record

BHS Stage 1 syllabus, 01 September 2026. Please note: This document is uncontrolled once printed. Please check with the BHS Education Team for the most up to date version.

The BHS Skills Record tracks your training to help you prepare for your assessment. Your coach will sign your Skills Record when you are ready to take your assessment. We recommend you have this signed off before you sit your Stage 1 assessment.

Download your [Skills Record](#).

Purchase your [Skills Record](#).

What could this qualification lead to?

Employers recognise the BHS Stage 1 as a starting point for a career with horses. This qualification could help you to get your first job, working under supervision. You can also progress to BHS Stage 2.

BHS Stage 1 Care

The Stage 1 assessment will take place at a BHS Approved Riding Centre. You can train for and take your assessment at the same BHS Approved Riding Centre. After booking your assessment we will inform you of your start time for your assessment. Upon arrival at your assessment, you will meet your assessor. They will let you know the timetable for the day and provide the opportunity for you to ask any questions.

During the assessment the assessor will observe you completing practical tasks. They will also ask you questions. You will need follow safe procedures as you would when handling horses you do not know. You will complete the practical tasks efficiently. This means completing tasks in the best possible manner without wasting time. You must treat every horse you meet with empathy and respect. Working with different types of horses will help you prepare for your assessment.

The syllabus below details the content of the Stage 1 Care. Guidance for reading the syllabus is from page 21.

Learning Outcome	Assessment Criteria	Guidance on the content to be learnt during training and sampled during assessment	Assessment Method
1. Know the responsibilities for working on an equestrian yard	1.1 State the responsibilities for working on an equestrian yard	Responsibilities with regards to the following: • Animal welfare • Safeguarding • Health and Safety • Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion • Data protection • Reporting lines	Discussion
2. Be able to maintain a clean stable	2.1 Muck out and put a bed down	Full muck out (excluding deep litter) to include: • Working safely and efficiently • Selection and use of tools • Minimal wastage of clean bedding Put a bed down to include: • Suitable depth • Banks	Observation
	2.2 Provide water	May include: • Bucket or automatic drinker • Appropriate positioning of bucket • Frequency of cleaning • Working safely and efficiently	Observation and discussion
	2.3 Skip out and tidy a stable	Skip out to include: • Selection of tools • Working safely and efficiently	Observation and discussion

Learning Outcome	Assessment Criteria	Guidance on the content to be learnt during training and sampled during assessment	Assessment Method
		Tidying the stable to include: • Levelling the bedding • Sweeping back • Checking water	
	2.4 Discuss the use of a range of bedding for horses	Range = 2 or more Bedding may include: • Shavings • Straw • Wood pellets • Rubber matting • Flax/hemp	Discussion
	2.5 Describe how to maintain a muck heap	Maintenance to include: • Compacting down • Keeping muck heap area tidy	Discussion
3. Be able to carry out routine grooming tasks	3.1 State reasons for grooming	Reasons may include: • Appearance • Health and welfare • Relationship with horse	Discussion
	3.2 Identify a range of items in a grooming kit	Range = 3 or more Items may include: • Body brush • Dandy brush • Flick brush • Rubber curry comb • Metal curry comb • Hoof pick • Mane and tail brush	Observation and discussion
	3.3 Groom a horse	Grooming to include: • Securing the horse • Working safely and efficiently • Use of equipment • Picking out feet	Observation

Learning Outcome	Assessment Criteria	Guidance on the content to be learnt during training and sampled during assessment	Assessment Method
		- Folding rug as required - Handling horse safely	
	3.4 Identify if a horse needs shoeing or trimming	May include: - Clenches - Condition of feet - Condition of shoes	Discussion
	3.5 Identify a range of external parts of the horse's foot	Range = 3 or more Parts may include: - Wall - Toe - Bulbs of the heel - Sole - Frog - Bars - White line	Observation
	3.6 Describe how to groom a horse after exercise	Groom to include: - Checking horse for injury - Washing or brushing off sweat - Use of cooler	Discussion
4. Be able to describe horses and know about horse behaviour and health	4.1 State a horse's welfare needs	Welfare needs (Five Domains) may include: - Nutrition (forage, water and diet) - Suitable and safe environment (stable and field) - Health (protection from pain, injury and disease) - Company (social interactions with horses and people, expressing natural instincts) - Mental wellbeing	Discussion

Learning Outcome	Assessment Criteria	Guidance on the content to be learnt during training and sampled during assessment	Assessment Method
	4.2 Identify a range of points of the horse	Range = 4 or more Points may include: • Poll • Withers • Shoulder • Croup • Loins • Elbow • Knee • Stifle • Hock • Fetlock • Pastern	Observation and discussion
	4.3 Estimate the height of a horse or pony	Height estimate to include: • Hands or centimetres • Within 10-15 centimetres or 4-6 inches of actual height	Observation and discussion
	4.4 Identify colours and markings	Colours may include any common horse colours. Face markings may include: • Blaze • Stripe • Star • White face • Snip Leg markings may include: • White markings (socks and stockings are acceptable) • Ermine marks	Observation and discussion

Learning Outcome	Assessment Criteria	Guidance on the content to be learnt during training and sampled during assessment	Assessment Method
	4.5 Identify signs of good and poor health	Signs may include: • General body condition • Coat condition • Eyes and nose • Appetite • Droppings • Movement and stance	Observation and discussion
	4.6 Describe routine checks to monitor health and welfare	Routine checks to include: • Morning checks • Evening checks • General observations throughout the day	Discussion
	4.7 Outline the signs of a horse being overweight or underweight	Signs in relation to key areas of the horse's body: • Crest • Ribs • Quarters • Importance of looking from all angles • Awareness of Fat/Condition scoring	Discussion
	4.8 Describe the horse's natural instincts	Range = 2 or more Natural instincts may include: • Herd animals • Flight, or fight or freeze • Grazers How natural instincts may affect the horse when: • Turned out • Stabled • Startled • Left alone	Discussion

Learning Outcome	Assessment Criteria	Guidance on the content to be learnt during training and sampled during assessment	Assessment Method
	4.9 Describe horse behaviour that may suggest it is not safe to approach	May include: • Body language • Facial expressions • Movement and stance • In the stable • In the field	Discussion
5. Be able to use rugs appropriately	5.1 Identify a range of rugs and their use	Range = 2 or more Rug types may include: • Turnout rug • Stable rug • Cooler • Fly rug Know when a rug is not required	Observation and discussion
	5.2 Put a rug on and take a rug off	To include: • Safe and efficient procedure • Consideration for horse • Rug secured • Handle horse safely	Observation
	5.3 Assess the fit of the rug	Fit to include: • Length • Depth • Length of straps • Common places to check for rubs and sores	Observation and discussion
	5.4 Describe the consequences of a poor fitting rug	Consequences may include: • Horse welfare • Damage to rug • Safety	Discussion
6. Be able to tack up and untack	6.1 Identify parts of the saddle and bridle	Parts of the saddle may include: • Cantle	Observation and discussion

Learning Outcome	Assessment Criteria	Guidance on the content to be learnt during training and sampled during assessment	Assessment Method
		• Pommel • Seat • Saddle flap • Skirt • Stirrup bar Parts of the bridle may include: • Noseband • Cheekpieces • Brow band • Headpiece • Throatlash	
	6.2 Tack up and untack a horse with a saddle and bridle	Tack up and untack to include: • Safe and efficient procedure • Securing the horse • Handle horse safely • Handling of rug if required • Carrying and storage of tack	Observation
	6.3 Put on a martingale	Running martingale to include: • Safe and efficient procedure • Securing the horse • With bridle and saddle	Observation
	6.4 Put on a pair of brushing boots	To include: • Safe and efficient procedure • Velcro attachment • Front or hind boots	Observation

Learning Outcome	Assessment Criteria	Guidance on the content to be learnt during training and sampled during assessment	Assessment Method
	6.5 Check tack for safety	Areas of tack may include: • Stirrup leathers • Cheek pieces • Reins • Girth straps	Observation and discussion
	6.6 Outline checks to make on tack for comfort before riding	Checks may include: Bridle • Bit • Noseband • Throatlash Saddle • Saddle too big or too small • Pommel too low • Saddle not central • Girth Martingale • Neck strap • Attachment to reins Numnah/saddle pad • Suitability and fit Brushing boots • Size	Discussion and observation
	6.7 State the reasons why tack should be checked for comfort and safety	Reasons may include: • Horse welfare and wellbeing • Safety of horse • Safety of rider	Discussion

Learning Outcome	Assessment Criteria	Guidance on the content to be learnt during training and sampled during assessment	Assessment Method
	6.8 Clean a bridle	Clean may include: • Stripping bridle • Cleaning and applying leather dressing (saddle soap, cream or spray) • Washing bit • Putting a bridle back together correctly	Observation and discussion
	6.9 State the reasons for cleaning tack	Reasons may include: • Comfort • Care of tack • Safety	Discussion
7. Be able to handle a horse	7.1 Discuss how correct handling affects the horse	Correct handling may include: • Empathy • Respect • Consistency • Clear and timely aids	Discussion
	7.2 Handle horses safely	To include: • Awareness of horse behaviour • Be able to react accordingly • In the stable • Outside the stable	Observation and discussion
	7.3 Put on a headcollar and tie a horse up	To include: • Approaching horse • Safe and efficient procedure • Checking fit of headcollar	Observation
	7.4 Hold a horse for treatment or inspection	To include: • Holding and positioning horse • Positioning of handler	Observation

Learning Outcome	Assessment Criteria	Guidance on the content to be learnt during training and sampled during assessment	Assessment Method
		Awareness of horse behaviour and reactions	
	7.5 Lead a horse in walk and trot in a bridle	Leading to include: - Leading horse out of stable - Leading horse in walk - Turning the horse - Leading horse in trot - Appropriate positioning of handler - Safe handling of horse - Awareness of horse behaviour and reactions	Observation
	7.6 Describe how to turn out and catch a horse	Turning out may include: - Safe and efficient procedure - Individual horse - Group of horses - Awareness of dangers - PPE to wear - Positioning of horse and handler - Releasing horse Catching to include: - Safe and efficient procedure - Approaching a horse - Awareness of horse behaviour - Awareness of other horses in field	Discussion
	7.7 Identify a range of routine field checks	Range = 3 or more Field checks to include:	Discussion

Learning Outcome	Assessment Criteria	Guidance on the content to be learnt during training and sampled during assessment	Assessment Method
		• Regularity of checks • Fencing (boundaries) • Water • Shelter • Gate and gateway • Ground conditions • Poisonous plants- ragwort, oak, yew, foxglove, sycamore	
8. Be able to provide food and water to a horse	8.1 Explain a range of rules of feeding	Range = 2 or more Rules of feeding, may include: • Feed plenty of roughage • Feed little and often • Use good quality feed • Feed according to workload and bodyweight • Make changes to feed gradually • Feed something succulent daily (food with water content for example grass) • Avoid exercising one hour after cereal-based meals • Maintain a consistent routine • Practise good hygiene	Discussion
	8.2 State the importance of providing clean water to a horse	Importance to include: • Health • Welfare • Weather conditions • Following work • Amount horse drinks in a day	Discussion

Learning Outcome	Assessment Criteria	Guidance on the content to be learnt during training and sampled during assessment	Assessment Method
	8.3 Identify a range of common horse feeds	Range = 3 or more Horse feed may include: • Coarse mix • Cubes • Chaff • Sugar beet- unsoaked and soaked • Soaked feed • Balancers • Hay • Haylage • Succulents and how to prepare (for example carrots)	Observation and discussion
	8.4 Identify signs of good and poor quality feed	Signs to include: • Appearance • Smell Feed to include: • Forage • Bagged feed	Discussion
	8.5 Describe how to prepare feed	Preparation to include: • Following instructions • Using a feed chart • Soaking feed • Soaking hay	Observation and discussion
	8.6 Provide a haynet to a horse	To include: • Safe and efficient procedure • Weighing haynet • Tie haynet up safely	Observation
	8.7 State a range of methods for providing forage	Range = 2 or more Methods may include: • Providing forage in the	Discussion

Learning Outcome	Assessment Criteria	Guidance on the content to be learnt during training and sampled during assessment	Assessment Method
		field • Providing forage in the stable	
	8.8 Describe how to maintain good hygiene in feed areas	May include: • Feed room • Feed store • Cleanliness • Preventing vermin • Cross contamination (for example use of supplements or medication) • Buckets and utensils • Storage	Discussion

BHS Stage 1 Ride

The Stage 1 Ride assessment will involve you riding two horses, one after the other. You will be in a group of up to six horses and riders. The horses you ride may be forward going or laid back. There will be a caller in the arena to give you instructions for a variety of ridden exercises.

You must ride with sympathetic aids and with respect for your horse and the other riders in the arena. Riding different types of horses will help you prepare for your assessment.

The syllabus below details the content of the Stage 1 Ride. Guidance for reading the syllabus is from page 21.

Learning Outcome	Assessment Criteria	Guidance on the content to be learnt during training and sampled during assessment	Assessment Method
1. Prepare horse and tack before mounting	1.1 Check the tack for safety and comfort before mounting	Checks to include: • Comfort for horse • Saddle • Bridle • Girth • Stirrups	Observation
	1.2 Position horse in preparation for mounting	To Include: • Lead horse • Position horse at mounting block • Safe positioning of horse and handler	Observation

Learning Outcome	Assessment Criteria	Guidance on the content to be learnt during training and sampled during assessment	Assessment Method
2. Be able to mount and dismount from a horse	2.1 Mount and adjust girth and stirrups	Mounting to include: • Safe procedure • Control of horse • Use of mounting block • Comfort of horse Adjust girth and stirrups to include: • Safe procedure • Whilst mounted • Comfort of horse • Keep feet in stirrups* <i>*Unless candidate has been granted a reasonable adjustment</i>	Observation
	2.2 Dismount and adjust tack	Dismount to include: • Safe positioning of horse • Safe procedure • Adjust tack for comfort • Prepare horse to be led out of the arena	Observation
3. Be able to ride horses in walk, trot and canter under supervision	LEARNERS WILL BE REQUIRED TO RIDE TWO HORSES IN THIS SECTION		
	3.1 State the reasons for warming up and cooling down a horse	Reasons may include: • Preparation for work • Recovery • Horse welfare and wellbeing	Discussion

Learning Outcome	Assessment Criteria	Guidance on the content to be learnt during training and sampled during assessment	Assessment Method
	3.2 Ride in a balanced and secure position with stirrups	May include: • Walk, trot and canter on both reins • Maintain control when riding as part of a group or independently • Control, position and use of short whip (75centimetres/30 inches or less) Balanced and secure position to include: • Basic security in saddle • Non-restrictive to horse	Observation
	3.3 Ride showing respect and consideration for the horse and other riders	To include: • Use of sympathetic aids • Awareness of other users of the school • Following the rules of the school	Observation
	3.4 Maintain a balanced position in walk and trot without stirrups	To include: • Crossing over stirrups Balanced position to include: • Non-restrictive to horse • Basic security in saddle	Observation

Learning Outcome	Assessment Criteria	Guidance on the content to be learnt during training and sampled during assessment	Assessment Method
	3.5 Maintain a balanced position in trot and canter in a light seat	Light seat to include: - Adjusting stirrups for light seat Balanced position to include: - Basic security in light seat position - Non-restrictive to horse	Observation
	3.6 Maintain a balanced position over trotting poles	Trotting poles to include: - Single pole - Three poles in line (straight line and on diagonal line) Balanced position to include: - In light seat - In rising trot	Observation
	3.7 Ride transitions between the paces	Upward and downward transitions to include: - Halt - Walk - Trot - Canter	Observation
	3.8 Ride simple school figures	School figures may include: - Changes of rein - Turns and circles - Riding across the arena	Observation
	3.9 Outline the aids for riding transitions and turns	Aids may include: - Leg - Rein - Body position - Clear and timely aids - Consistency of aids	Observation and discussion

Learning Outcome	Assessment Criteria	Guidance on the content to be learnt during training and sampled during assessment	Assessment Method
	3.10 Ride on the correct trot diagonal	Correct trot diagonal to include: Correcting and changing diagonal when needed and when changing rein	Observation and discussion
	3.11 State the number of beats within the pace and the sequence of footfalls	Pace may include: - Walk - Trot - Canter	Discussion
	3.12 Recognise correct canter leads	To include: Recognising if the inside foreleg is appearing to lead	Observation and discussion

Guidance for reading the syllabus

Learning Outcome

The content of the syllabus includes learning outcomes. These are statements that describe significant and essential learning. Learning outcomes identify what the candidate will know, understand and be able to do.

Assessment Criteria

The content of the syllabus includes assessment criteria. Assessment criteria identify what is expected from the assessed work. Assessment criteria should be clear, specify the standard that must be met and what evidence will be used to show achievement of the broader learning outcome.

All assessment criteria will be assessed. Candidates must achieve all assessment criteria to 'pass'.

Achieved learning outcomes can be 'banked'. The candidate is only required to resit learning outcomes that have not been achieved.

Assessment criteria are made up of two essential parts – the command verb and the subject matter:

1. 'command' = instruction
'verb' = what it is you are to do
2. 'subject matter' = the topic

At Stage 1, the command verbs used are:

Assess	To judge the value of
Describe	Paint a picture in words. Does not include reasoning
Discuss	Talk about the topic
Estimate	Form an approximate judgement or opinion
Explain	A description with reasons. Often starts with 'because'

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Identify	State or recognise, usually from a visual prompt
Outline	Identify the main features
State	Provide information in a brief uncomplicated form

Guidance

Guidance offers more information about the assessment criteria. It identifies content that will be learnt during training and sampled during assessment. A candidate should be familiar with the content to prepare for assessment.

- The detail provided in the guidance gives examples of the subject content. When preparing for your assessment try not to limit your learning only to the points listed but work with your coach to gain a rounded view of each subject.
- Where 'to include' is stated, this means all content listed must be learnt during training and may be assessed on the assessment day.
- Where 'may include' is stated, this means all content listed must be learnt during training, along with others. Some or all may be assessed on the assessment day.
- Where a specific number in a range is stated, this means the full list must be learnt during training and a minimum of that specific number may be assessed on the assessment day.
- An assessor will decide the number of aspects in the list to be assessed. This is so they can be secure in their assessment of your knowledge and skills.

Assessment method

How the assessor will collect evidence against the assessment criteria. At Stage 1 they will either observe the candidate carrying out a practical task or they will ask the candidate questions.

Get in touch

Email: education@bhs.org.uk | Telephone: 02476 840508 | Website: www.bhs.org.uk

The British Horse Society is always open to feedback on how we can improve the accessibility of our documents. If you would like to share your feedback please get in touch at dei@bhs.org.uk

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