



BHS Stage 1 Syllabus

Version Date: **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.



BHS Stage 1 Complete

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

- The foundations for good horse care and wellbeing
- Horse behaviour and welfare
- Basic riding skills

How to achieve the BHS Stage 1 Complete

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

- BHS Stage 1 Care
- BHS Stage 1 Ride

Each of these units are also individual qualifications.

Entry requirements

- A minimum of 13 years old.
- BHS Gold Membership or BHS Silver Candidate Membership.

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. Working with different types of horses will help you prepare for your assessment.

**Find a BHS
Approved
Centre**

**Find a BHS
Accredited
Professional
Coach**

**Find
training**

**BHS
Training
Hub |
Facebook*
(*min age 13)**

Skills Record

The BHS Skills Record tracks your training to help you prepare for your assessment. We recommend you have this signed off before you sit your assessment, however it's not a compulsory requirement at Stage 1.

**Download
your Skills
Record**

**Purchase
your Skills
Record**

What could this qualification lead to?

This qualification will give you the knowledge, skills and confidence to carry out routine tasks when caring for horses. This may also include exercising horses. Employers recognise 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.

Support available

If you require access arrangements, including reasonable adjustments for your assessment, we're here to help. Access Arrangements can be applied to these assessments in line with our Policy for Access Arrangements at BHS Assessments. Click the button below for our guidance.

**Reasonable
Adjustments**

Further guidance

Don't forget to check out our website. You'll find lots more helpful guidance and support, including assessment fees, training videos, what to bring to your assessment and frequently asked questions.

**More
information**

BHS Stage 1 Care

Your Stage 1 assessment will take place at a BHS Approved Riding Centre. You can train and be assessed at the same Centre.

When you arrive, you'll meet your assessor. They'll let you know the timetable for the day and give you the chance to ask any questions. We understand you might feel a bit nervous, but please don't worry. Our assessors are friendly, patient, and here to help you do your best.

During your assessment, the assessor will watch you carry out a range of practical tasks and will ask you some questions as you go. You'll need to follow safe procedures, just as you would when handling horses you don't know. You'll be expected to complete tasks in an efficient way, which simply means working carefully, confidently, and without wasting time.

Above all, you must show empathy, respect and kindness to every horse you meet. This is an important part of your Stage 1 journey and helps show you're ready for the next steps in your equestrian development.

You'll find the full **Stage 1 Care** syllabus below. Guidance on how to read and use the syllabus starts on page 16.

To achieve the BHS Stage 1 Care qualification, you must successfully achieve all Learning Outcomes.

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

Learning Outcome	Assessment Criteria	Guidance on the content to be learnt during training and sampled during assessment	Assessment Method
	2.3 Skip out and tidy a stable	Skip out to include: • Selection of tools • Working safely and efficiently Tidying the stable to include: • Levelling the bedding • Sweeping back • Checking water	Observation and discussion
	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 • Folding rug as required • Handling horse safely	Observation
	3.4 Identify if a horse needs shoeing or trimming	May include: • Clenches • Condition of feet • Condition of shoes	Discussion

Learning Outcome	Assessment Criteria	Guidance on the content to be learnt during training and sampled during assessment	Assessment Method
	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
	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	Observation and discussion

Learning Outcome	Assessment Criteria	Guidance on the content to be learnt during training and sampled during assessment	Assessment Method
		• Snip Leg markings may include: • White markings (socks and stockings are acceptable) • Ermine marks	
	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 horses when: • Turned out • Stabled • Startled • Left alone	Discussion
	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

Learning Outcome	Assessment Criteria	Guidance on the content to be learnt during training and sampled during assessment	Assessment Method
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 • Pommel • Seat • Saddle flap • Skirt • Stirrup bar Parts of the bridle may include: • Noseband • Cheekpieces • Brow band • Headpiece • Throatlash	Observation and discussion
	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	Observation

Learning Outcome	Assessment Criteria	Guidance on the content to be learnt during training and sampled during assessment	Assessment Method
		With bridle and saddle	
	6.4 Put on a pair of brushing boots	To include: - Safe and efficient procedure - Velcro attachment - Front or hind boots	Observation
	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 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
	6.8 Clean a bridle	Clean may include: - Stripping bridle - Cleaning and applying leather dressing (saddle soap, cream or spray) - Washing a bit - Putting a bridle back together correctly	Observation and discussion

Learning Outcome	Assessment Criteria	Guidance on the content to be learnt during training and sampled during assessment	Assessment Method
	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 • Consistency • Respect • 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 a horse • Positioning of handler • Awareness of horse behaviour and reactions	Observation
	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

Learning Outcome	Assessment Criteria	Guidance on the content to be learnt during training and sampled during assessment	Assessment Method
	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 range of routine field checks	Range = 3 or more Field checks to include: • Regularity of checks • Fencing (boundaries) • Water • Shelter • Gate and gateway • Ground conditions • Poisonous plants – ragwort, oak, yew, foxglove, sycamore	Discussion
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
	8.3 Identify a range of common horse feeds	Range = 3 or more Horse feed may include: • Coarse mix • Cubes	Observation and discussion

Learning Outcome	Assessment Criteria	Guidance on the content to be learnt during training and sampled during assessment	Assessment Method
		• Chaff • Sugar beet – unsoaked and soaked • Soaked feed • Balancers • Hay • Haylage • Succulents and how to prepare (for example carrots)	
	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 field • Providing forage in the stable	Discussion
	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

Your Stage 1 Ride assessment will involve you riding two horses, one after the other. You'll 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 who will guide you through a range of ridden exercises and give you clear instructions. Your responsibility is to ride with sympathetic, effective aids and to show respect for your horse, as well as awareness of the other riders around you.

Your riding assessment will take approximately one hour; which includes a short break whilst riders swap horses.

Riding a variety of horses before your assessment will help you feel confident and prepared.

You'll find the full **Stage 1 Ride** syllabus below. Guidance on how to read and use the syllabus starts on page 16.

To achieve the BHS Stage 1 Ride qualification, you must successfully achieve all Learning Outcomes.

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 the 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
2. Be able to mount and dismount 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

Learning Outcome	Assessment Criteria	Guidance on the content to be learnt during training and sampled during assessment	Assessment Method
	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 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
	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 (no longer than 75 centimetres/30 inches) Balanced and secure position to include: • Basic security in the saddle • Non-restrictive to the 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 the horse • Basic security in the saddle	Observation
	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 a light seat position • Non-restrictive to horse	Observation

Learning Outcome	Assessment Criteria	Guidance on the content to be learnt during training and sampled during assessment	Assessment Method
	3.6 Maintain a balanced position over trotting poles	Trotting poles to include: • Single pole • Three poles in a 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
	3.10 Ride on the correct trot diagonal	Correct trot diagonal to include: • Correcting and changing diagonal when needed and 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

The Stage 1 syllabus includes Learning Outcomes, Assessment Criteria, Guidance and Assessment Method. Understanding these will help you prepare confidently.

Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes describe the important knowledge and skills you should gain through your training. They explain what you should know, understand, and be able to do by the end of your learning.

If you pass a learning outcome, you can 'bank' it. This means that if you need to retake your assessment, you only need to resit the learning outcomes you haven't passed yet.

Assessment Criteria

Assessment criteria explain what the assessor will look for during your assessment.

They:

- describe the standard you must meet.
- specify what evidence the assessor will use to decide whether you've achieved the learning outcome.

Assessment criteria are made up of two main parts:

1

**'command verb': the instruction
what you need to do**

2

**'subject matter': the topic being
assessed**

Stage 1 command verbs

These are the command verbs used at Stage 1, and what they mean:

Assess	To judge the value of
Describe	Paint a picture in words. No reasons needed
Discuss	Talk about the topic
Estimate	Make an approximate judgement or opinion
Explain	A description with reasons. Often includes "because"
Identify	State or recognise, usually from a visual prompt
Outline	Identify the main features
State	Provide information in a clear, simple way

Guidance

Guidance gives extra information about the assessment criteria. It helps you understand what you'll learn in training and what may be checked during assessment.

- The examples in the guidance show possible areas you'll learn, but they're not the only things you should know. Work with your coach to build a full understanding of each topic.
- If the syllabus states "to include", all listed content must be learned and may be assessed.
- If it states "may include", you must still learn all listed content plus related areas. Some or all of it may be assessed.
- If a range includes a specific number, you must learn the full list, but only at least that specific number will be assessed.
- The assessor will choose how many points to assess so they can be confident in your knowledge and skills.

Assessment method

This explains how the assessor will check your learning. At Stage 1, they will gather evidence by:

- Observation: watching you complete practical tasks, and/or
- Discussion: asking you questions.

Grading method

This qualification will be graded Pass / Fail

Get in touch

Email: education@bhs.org.uk

Telephone: 02476 840508

Website: www.bhs.org.uk