



# **‘A lifestyle rather than a job’**

**A review and recommendations on mental health support within the British horse racing industry.**

**Liverpool John Moores University and Racing Welfare  
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## **Research Team**

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## Executive Summary

This report examines the interaction between working patterns in horseracing and the mental health of the aligned workforce. The research was conducted by the School of Sport & Exercise Sciences at Liverpool John Moores University, and was commissioned by Racing Welfare. The main funders for the project are the Racing Foundation. Certainly, literature exists on mental health within British racing, but this exploratory study looks to explore both the 'breadth' of issues raised by the workforce generally, alongside gaining some 'depth' in terms of the prevalence of concerns.

The report begins by looking at the generic costs involved in mental health, and also sets out the background to the research. Essentially, data was collected through face to face interviews and focus groups with 131 individuals alongside a wider questionnaire completed by over 1500 respondents. Overall, five main cohorts, or sectors, of the industry are referred to in this report: generic employees (mainly racecourse & administration); jockeys; the stud and breeding sector; trainers; and training yard staff.

In order to ensure information succinctly positions the results, the report continues by providing generic, priority recommendations that have emanated from the research. These generic recommendations focus on development in four areas, mainly strategic alignment & leadership, the expansion of industrial provision, intensified business support, and career & personal development. Alongside these priority recommendations, a brief summary of the specific recommendations, in reference to each cohort, is also included here.

Preceding this overview, the report breaks down its findings and recommendations along the cited five cohorts. First, in relation to the generic workforce, no face to face engagement took place but leading statistics are presented along with tentative recommendations. These recommendations look at further examination around non-equine specific work and mental health in racing, a greater understanding of the 'backstage' of racing performance like event workers, and fostering intensified partnerships with related, representative, bodies.

Second, for jockeys, recommendations focus on career transition, extension of the jockey coaching scheme, peer support systems, savings and financial advice, and regular sport science support. These recommendations are based out of respondent information but also the three major psychological themes. These themes involve the loneliness of the profession, the financial uncertainty that is accrued with being a jockey, and the relentless itinerary of their work.

Third, in relation to the stud and breeding sector, recommendations are positioned around the expansion of managerial training, intensified support for rural studs, the integration of mental health in performative evaluations, a co-ordinated response to injury prevention & rehabilitation, and a greater examination of the impact of tied accommodation on individuals' lives. These recommendations are based around themes that relate to learned dependency, career progression difficulties and the challenges of maintaining a work-life balance.

Fourth, like the other cohorts, a number of recommendations are made to support trainers' mental health including debt collection systems, enhanced business support, increased deployment of

resources through the National Trainers' Federation, the provision of mentoring, and an intensified dialogue with trainers and their families around accessing current services. Again recommendations here are by-products of themes around blurred boundaries between work and life, ongoing business precarity, and the difficulty in developing flexible working patterns around equine care.

Finally, for training yard staff recommendations focus on greater innovation to develop flexibility in working patterns, delivery of 'in-house' education, the expansion of psychological support to include performative elements, bespoke training to yard management, and the diversification of promotional platforms to expand existing services. These recommendations are based on direct feedback in relation to themes that focus on a lack of flexibility in working patterns, managing injury, and concerns around career progression.

It is worth highlighting that the recommendations included in this report are not meant as a static roadmap to be followed. The aim, instead, is to encourage dialogue and debate around these themes to facilitate greater well-being in the entire British horseracing industry workforce. It was noted by respondents and those interviewed, that racing is a 'relentless' industry which, for many, has intensified over the last number of years. Such a pace may be unsustainable psychologically for a number of sectors and individuals within the racing fraternity. There are, however, good initiatives and ideas already in place, and with greater collaboration, strategic direction, and open dialogue these structures can be expanded to offset many of the current themes and concerns raised in this report.

## Generic Priority Recommendations

### A: Mental health strategic alignment and leadership

#### 1. Inclusive Mental Health Stakeholder forum and strategy

An inclusive, industrial stakeholder forum is required to design a robust strategy that commits to supporting mental health in the long term. Such a strategy will help avoid industrial duplication, repetition and ensure a tailored, collaborative, response. The group itself could potentially consist of members from across the racing industry, while the strategy includes the following:

- A clear statement which commits racing to developing a working environment that promotes employee health and well-being.
- Outlines the responsibilities of key stakeholders in relation to human resources, occupational health and educational systems.
- Sets out the advice, support and training that the workforce requires to enhance wellbeing.
- Provides specific detail on how the industry will comply with current legislation in relation to supporting individuals with varying needs through tailored support.
- Include a process of evaluation on all wellbeing initiatives.
- Receive regular review and alteration through a monitoring and accountability framework.
- Be championed and promoted by senior management within the relevant stakeholders.

#### 2. Leadership development programme focused on wellbeing

In order to embed mental health and wellbeing within the industry, a leadership development programme (LDP), that focuses on the moral and practical implications of mis-management around workforce health, will look to enhance productivity through employee satisfaction as well as robust structures and processes. This LDP will include:

- A targeted approach to those within organisations who have a responsibility for leadership or management e.g. stud managers, trainers & assistant trainers, racecourse directors and so forth.
- Involve a high degree of individual executive coaching as well as group work to ensure confidentiality, tailoring, and concise feedback.
- Ensure those in positions of industry authority also have access to supportive structures around wellbeing.
- Acknowledgement that mental health is not simply an individual issue but also operates at the team and organisational level.
- Training for management to direct and refer the workforce as required around poor mental health and ill health.
- Awareness of approaches and strategies to foster workplace thriving and growth.
- A focus on leadership within stakeholder bodies in order that they act as role models for the industry and 'champion' good mental health practices.

## **B: Expanding Industrial Provision to promote good mental health**

### 1. Inclusive provision beyond the racing centres

Currently the provision of support around mental health is concentrated to the racing 'centres' i.e. Lambourn, Newmarket, Epsom, Malton and Middleham. Although it is important to begin with these centres, there is a large amount of the workforce spread around the country that may be geographically restricted in terms of access. There is a danger therefore of a 'two tier' system of provision. Furthermore, with the current research suggesting the industry is made up of small to medium sized operators there is a greater need for plurality and diversity of provision e.g. staff cannot be released for workshop training elsewhere etc. Such support may include:

- Extension of the Racing Welfare officer network. Currently there are a number of 'roving' officers but this may need to be extended further.
- Expansion of the current digital and distance support services offered by Racing Welfare via Racing's Support Line (e.g. confidential helpline, online Cognitive Behavioural Therapy etc.) to include educational resources (e.g. Moodle, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC)) that tackle the stigma and use of language around mental health.
- It may be advisable for more organisations (e.g. racecourses) to act as local hubs for information and support around mental health and wellbeing to extend access for those in more rural areas.

### 2. Risk Assessments in relation to workplace stress

The research here suggests sub clinical issues like anxiety, non-clinical depression, and stress may be both a product of, and an inhibiting factor, in terms of work. Currently the systems in place are only supportive of issues at clinical or crisis levels for staff. In order to begin to embrace a preventative approach, encouraging risks assessment in relation to work related stress may help employers ensure they are fulfilling their duty of care at a moral and legislative level. Mental Health First Aid (MHFA), for example, is important at such crisis moments but it is important the 'drip drip' impact of daily poor mental health is acknowledged. Such risk assessments would look to foster appropriate training for those in management positions and include:

- An understanding of the early signs of poor mental health and strategies in place to ensure it is tackled.
- Peer support programmes between staff.
- Strategies to delineate the boundaries between work and personal life.
- Approaches to managing presenteeism, absenteeism and leaveism within the workforce.
- Directly addressing stigma by undermining the notion of being 'tough' within the sport (e.g. Wellness Action Plan)
- Implementation of health questionnaires and pathways for individuals to self-report concerns.
- Robust induction and recruitment processes to identify needs of an employee in advance of commencement of work to ensure workplace adjustments.

## C: Promoting organisational well-being through intensified business support

### 1. Increased awareness and support around Working Time Regulations (WTR)

An issue that was raised throughout the research was the balance of work and life. Although consideration needs to be taken here of the performative nature of the sport, and its recreational engagement by users, the weekly workload potentially seems unsustainable individually or organisationally. The concern is that extensive working hours, including overtime without pay, is now normalised, placing great psychological strain on those involved. It may be advisable therefore to:

- Further examine the Working Time Regulations (WTR), and its application to racing specifically, to help foster increased dialogue around adaptive working patterns.
- An industry wide education scheme to enable employers to avail of the WTR. Innovation may be required here to help employers protect both themselves, as well as their employees, from work related psychological strain.
- An extensive, compulsory, industry down time that is built into, and protected, through stakeholder guidelines and legislation.
- A review of the fixture list in relation to the workforce capacity that services it.

### 2. Increase in flexible working patterns

The research highlights the dedication that the racing workforce across the industry pursue for their sport. The concern, however, is that such pursuit may have some negative consequences in the long term, with individuals not engaging in the appropriate self-care. In relation to poor mental health, it is not simply long hours that are the issue but the flexibility of when such hours are delivered (see Angrave and Charlwood 2015 p. 1507). 'Flexible working' describes a type of working arrangement which gives a degree of flexibility on how long, where, when and at what times employees work. Considering the requirements of equine care, a number of practical recommendations may be useful:

- An action research initiative to examine working patterns in other related livestock/care industries (e.g. farming, veterinary practices, wildlife maintenance) to acquire related ideas.
- Development of mechanisms to foster innovation both in terms of transferring and adapting practices from external industries, as well as promoting internal collaboration, to develop bespoke solutions on working pattern flexibility.
- An education initiative to detail to employers how flexible working patterns may be incorporated into their strategic and daily practices.
- Tailored identification and promotion around a number of flexible approaches (job share, compressed hours, paternity etc.) in order for staff to embrace alternative working practices
- A campaign to tackle the concept that being 'tough' within the sport involves working continuously or when in pain.

## D: Career and personal development (individual/psychological concepts)

### 1. Greater focus on career transitions

The disruption of social support systems and personal identity, which can influence mental health, is suggestive as not simply occurring at point of entry or exit from the workforce. In accordance with the 'Duty of Care Report in Sport' (2017) (Theme 2) it is potentially useful to embed a long term development strategy for sections of the workforce. This process may include:

- The extension of the long term athlete development (LTAD) strategy for those entering into the system as conditional/apprentice jockeys or professional work riders. Currently good foundation mechanisms are in place for such development and support (e.g. jockey coaching programme), but this could be extended to ensure a greater number of jockeys and work riders are accessing *more regularly* sport science support, educational training and lifestyle provision.
- Greater links with businesses, HE/FE establishments and professional bodies to extend training opportunities for the workforce beyond equine or industry related qualifications to increase a sense of occupational autonomy.
- Mental health and wellbeing initiatives to contain an 'age and stage' component, targeting particular demographics deemed at 'risk' across the working lifespan (e.g. younger men, those working in isolated settings, those with caring responsibilities etc.)

### 2. Review of injury and pain management systems in relation to mental health

The research illustrated the concern amongst staff towards the physicality of the work and related potential injuries and the impact of such work on mental health. Although not causal, it would seem worthwhile to investigate further the impact such injuries, or the fear of injury, has on ongoing mental health. Such an investigation would also be aligned with the 'Duty of Care Report in Sport' (2017)(Theme 7). Racing's Occupational Health service would seem the ideal vehicle to facilitate this investigation. Specific interventions could also be tailored around the following suggestions:

- A campaign to educate and tackle the stigma associated with 'lost bottle' i.e. fear of riding. This issue should not be viewed as a 'weakness' that is 'irreversible' but should be normalised and addressed through psychological processes similar to those that exist in other sports e.g. lost movement syndrome (LMS) in driving/gymnastics, 'yips' in cricket/golf and so forth.
- A robust examination of the medical linkage emerging between repeated head injury & concussion and mental ill-health issues. This issue is detailed in relation to other sports like motor racing and American football, and considering the risk of injuries that emerged here, it is suggested racing stakeholders examine this further in terms of a duty of care for the workforce.
- An examination of how employers engage in head injury assessments (HIAs) in relation to their staff.
- Enhanced psychological support integrated within Racing's Occupational Health Service for those deemed to be suffering from long term injuries.