
Overview

This standard is about the behaviour of equines. Each time you interact equines, you have the potential to alter their behaviour patterns for better or for worse.

The main focus of the standard is to ensure that the person working with the equine reinforces desirable behaviour patterns and does not set up new, undesirable ones. It is not about major training or retraining of equines, which should be left to those who specialise in such work, but knowing that each interaction you have with an equine will reinforce existing behaviours or create new ones. It is important therefore that you should understand the mechanisms by which behaviour is created or changed so that you can ensure that you are only creating or reinforcing desirable behaviours.

You also risk setting up behaviour patterns that may make it more difficult for you or others to successfully carry out work with the equine in the future. In order for you to work successfully with an equine, it is important that the equine has had appropriate training to allow that work to be carried out safely and effectively. Attempting to carry out routine care work with an equine that is not sufficiently well trained for that work represents a risk to your safety and a risk to the welfare of the equine.

This standard covers the skills necessary to assess an equine's behaviour in a safe and effective manner to ascertain whether it is safe to perform the required task. It also covers the skills and knowledge necessary to ensure that interactions with equines reinforce desired behaviour and do not result in setting up undesirable behaviour patterns. A good understanding of the processes of routine training will help to ensure that routine interactions with the equine complement the pre-existing training.

This standard relates to the following contexts and applications:

1. interacting with equines in a formal capacity (e.g. as veterinary surgeon, registered farrier and other equine disciplines)
2. designing routine training programmes to develop and reinforce desirable behaviours relating to your professional interaction with equines (e.g. if you are a farrier or hoof trimmer, understanding how to train an equine to pick its feet up safely and calmly)
3. having an awareness of where problem behaviours require referral to a more experienced or qualified specialist in equine behaviour and training.

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Assess and manage equine behaviour

Performance criteria

You must be able to:

General

- P1 interact with the equine in a humane manner that minimises stress and allows care and training to be carried out safely
- P2 maintain the health and safety of the equine, yourself and others throughout the process

You must be able to:

Training

- P3 identify equine behaviour patterns that are desirable and undesirable
- P4 identify the training that is required for the equine to achieve appropriate behaviour for the task that needs to be completed
- P5 recognise when the degree of training required means that it is not practical or safe to complete the task at hand at this visit
- P6 recognise whether the training required is within your level of ability or the owner's level of ability and understand when to request that the owner carries out further training and when to refer to a professional trainer
- P7 set appropriate training goals
- P8 create a shaping plan for a desired behaviour
- P9 implement the shaping plan using appropriate scientific principles of behaviour modification
- P10 modify the shaping plan as needed to take into account the response of the equine to the training so far
- P11 approach everyday tasks in a manner that reinforces desirable behaviour patterns and avoids creating undesirable behaviour patterns
- P12 recognise that the owner or other responsible person may have valid views on the approach taken to training that need to be taken account of

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Knowledge and understanding

You need to know and understand:

General

- K1 the relevance of appropriate legislation such as the Animal Welfare Act, the Veterinary Surgeons Act and the Farriers (Registration) Act 1975 as amended
- K2 that everyday interactions with equines represent training whether that is the intention or not and that failure to be aware of this can result in undesirable behaviour patterns being accidentally reinforced
- K3 the differences in perception between equines and humans caused by differences in the senses of sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch
- K4 the difference in natural survival behaviour between predator and prey animals and the relevance of this to equine behaviour patterns
- K5 the different natural behaviour patterns of horses, donkeys and mules and their effects on behaviour in domestication
- K6 how to recognise behaviour patterns that are the result of pain or discomfort or the result of previous traumatic experience and how to take account of these in your interaction with the equine
- K7 recognise where behaviour patterns may be influenced by the equine's immediate environment (e.g. a bag flapping in the wind, or the behaviour or a bystander or nearby animal) and understand how to take account of such factors
- K8 the importance of involving the owner or other responsible person

You need to know and understand:

Methods of behaviour reinforcement

- K9 the use of appropriate operant conditioning including the differences between positive and negative reinforcement and positive and negative punishment, the effects of these approaches on equine behaviour and the practical realities of applying each approach
- K10 the practical effects and consequences of classical conditioning on equine learning and behaviour
- K11 the concepts of flooding, systematic desensitization and counter conditioning
- K12 the importance of timing and consistency in training
- K13 schedules of reinforcement, how they can be used to establish and maintain desired behaviour and how they can result in undesirable behaviour patterns being maintained and becoming resistant to modification

You need to know and understand:

Planning a training programme

- K14 how to set appropriate and realistic training goals
- K15 how to use shaping (successive approximation) in your everyday work

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- (e.g. to break common tasks such as picking up feet into small steps)
- K16 the significance of the size of steps in the training plan and the application of the principles of shaping
- K17 how to write a shaping plan so as to break the overall training goal down into suitably small and progressive steps
- K18 how to use a shaping plan to ensure your health and safety and to avoid stress in the equine
- K19 how the use of shaping plans can assist other equine owners or carers in the training of their equines

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