

**Notes of the 'UK Equine Disease Coalition' meeting
Wednesday 6th May 2020
Via Zoom online platform**

Attendance:

Nadine Arber NA (Scottish Government)	Ben Mayes BM (FEEVA)
Mark Bowen MB (Nottingham University)	David Mountford DM (BEVA)
Shane Collins SC (DAERA)	Richard Newton RN (AHT)
Linda Evans LE (The Donkey Sanctuary)	Roly Owers RO (World Horse Welfare) – Chair
Alastair George AG (APHA)	Amanda Piggot AP (BHA)
Liz Kelly LK (World Horse Welfare)	Helen Roberts HR (Defra)
Alison Knox AK (Scottish Government)	Annabel Scott AS (Scottish Government)
Joe Latimer JL (Defra)	

Apologies:

Martyn Blissitt (Scottish Government), Marion Collins MC (Scottish Government), Stefan Craus SCr (Welsh Government), Gordon Hickman GH (Defra)

1. RO welcomed everyone to the meeting and welcomed Linda Evans (Veterinary Advisor – The Donkey Sanctuary), David Mountford (Chief Executive – British Equine Veterinary Association (BEVA)) and Joe Latimer (Defra) to the meeting. Joe has replaced Eleanor Glendenning who has moved to a different role – Joe has microbiology/virology background and will be working with HR in the equine disease policy team.
2. Notes on the previous meeting – Thu 14 Nov 19 – were agreed as an accurate record.
3. Matters arising not covered elsewhere on the agenda.
 - a. AHS vaccine update. RO provided an update from Göran Akerstrom (FEI Veterinary Director) – the FEI are involved in a research and development project at Onderstepoort through the International Horse Sport Confederation (following on from the original OIE project) and this is being led by Baptiste Dungu (BD). The project is also being supported by the Hong Kong Jockey Club. BD provided an update to the Asian Racing Congress in February – the project timeline established in 2018 is progressing well and a proof of concept should be ready for presentation in the end of 2021.
 - b. Equine movements template. AG confirmed that he had been in contact with Andy Paterson and this initiative was still work in progress.
4. Terms of Reference (ToR). The Coalition's revised Terms of Reference, including the amendments made at the 14 Nov 19 meeting, were approved.
5. Covid-19
 - a. Potential impact. RO said that knock-on effects of missed vaccinations tempered by change in RCVS guidance mid-April moving from emergency only to risk assessed veterinary visits. BM highlighted that there was certainly a significant increase in the use of telemedicine in practice – with antibiotics and phenylbutazone being prescribed remotely. DM noted a recent BEVA survey showed that >50% of vets are charging for remote consultations. DM also said that there was increasing pressure on equine dealers (with the current official hold on pre-purchase examinations) with anecdotal feedback that some dealers have gone bust. There is also a potential issue of horses remaining on dealers' yards with bankrupt owners. AS said that the Scottish Government had recently updated guidance for livestock and companion animal owners (including equine) – forwarded to all members.

- b. Animal Health Trust. RO reiterated the support of the Coalition (and the wider sector) to all the AHT team given the current situation – where staff are furloughed and a decision by Trustees due at the end of May. RN thanked everyone for their support, especially DM and the British Horse Council. He noted that some microbiology work would resume at the AHT next week – and the Trust had also offered equipment to the NHS to help cope with the Covid-19 response. DM said that there had been a positive response from non-TB sector to provide greater support to the AHT going forward. RN said he was hopeful that some form of rescue plan would materialise – especially around equine disease surveillance and research.

6. Disease update

- a. Equine Influenza. RN reported that there had been single reports of EI in the final 3 months of last year and a single confirmation (of 2 cases) in Essex to this year (in lapsed-vaccinated animals). There had similarly only been occasional notifications from mainland Europe (inc. Netherlands and France) – and the cases from Ireland noted by SC. AP reported that the proposed BHA consultation on EI vaccination protocols will likely be delayed until 2021 given Covid-19 – and the current revised requirement for annual boosters is likely to remain until any changes at the start of 2022. However, this approach will clearly be reviewed in the context of any EI outbreaks.

AP also reported the resumption to racing plan will include the launch of a vaccination app – developed by Weatherby's and an Irish company (the app has already been launched in Ireland) – which will remove the need to check paper passports on racecourses and vaccination status will be online – although this will require trainers to upload thousands of records.

RN asked SC how he had found out about the 2020 cases of EI through the Irish Equine Centre (IEC) as these had not been reported to the ICC at the AHT – SC confirmed this followed an email request for a presentation he was giving. SC offered to follow-up with the IEC on enhancing the liaison between them and the ICC.

- b. Contagious Equine Metritis. RN provided an update on the recent case in Fife in a non-TB stallion (imported from mainland Europe in November 2019) that tested PCR positive (at a BEVA approved lab) on 27 Mar during routine pre-breeding testing that was subsequently confirmed by the APHA reference lab in Penrith. The case was confirmed by the Scottish CVO on 3 Apr. On investigation it transpired that the stallion had already covered a mare from the same owner – the owner agreed to comply with the Code and cooperated with the approved vet. The mare has since been isolated, treated and tested on 3 occasions producing a negative result each time – so was not infected. The stallion has subsequently produced 2 positive PCR results (albeit decreasing titres) and is awaiting culture results – so this situation is ongoing. The investigation found that no other tracings were required. AG thanked the AHT for their excellent communication around this case.
- c. Equine Viral Arteritis. HR said that due to the Covid-19 priority and the staff change, with JL recently joining the team following EG's move, that a review of the 1995 Order, following last year's lessons learnt exercise, is still outstanding but will now be progressed. This will start with a review of the current control strategy (possibly following the approach adopted with CEM) and a suggested update put out to consultation. HR noted the aim would be to meet the Equine SI deadline early January 2021 – the aim of the SI will be to bring consistency to all infectious disease control (including Glanders).

- d. Equine Herpes Virus (EHV). MB queried whether there was a negative perception amongst vets regarding EHV vaccination and whether there should be greater guidance/recommendations with sporting disciplines and breeding establishments. RN noted that the HBLB Code was clear in recommending vaccination in pregnant mares and BM said that there is certainly a cost hurdle to promoting vaccination. RN also said that any change in regulatory approach would need to consider the long-term benefit and consequences of any change – as had been carried out post the 1979 EI outbreak – but possibly not by French racing in 2018 when they mandated EHV vaccination. RO referred to the attachment relating to the 2019 veterinary roundtable and DM confirmed that this had been promoted to BEVA members. It was agreed to discuss this issue further within the BEVA Health & Medicines Committee. **DM to action**
- e. Glanders. Referring to item 6f from the Nov 19 minutes, HR confirmed that the 10 horses imported from Kuwait had subsequently tested negative. She reiterated that these sorts of tests were not unusual.
- f. African Horse Sickness (AHS). RN provided an updated on the ongoing outbreak of AHS in Thailand – which is a serotype-1 strain – the origin of the outbreak is unclear but possibly following the import of zebra from southern Africa. Part of the country's control strategy includes the use of the OBP polyvalent vaccine. The OIE had run a series of 5 informative webinars on supporting Asian countries understand more about the disease – and Thailand was clearly highlighting the importance of protecting horses from the vectors. The number of horses in Thailand (~12,000) seems very low.

LE noted that the International Coalition for Working Equids (ICWE) had been supporting the OIE through the provision of illustrative posters for working equid owners in the region – focusing on clinical signs of the disease in horses and in donkeys – and also on how to protect equids from the disease. There are concerns that working equids are not included in the updated census numbers, and disease is close to borders with neighbouring Cambodia and Malaysia (where there is a significant population of working equids). HR noted that the UK does import horses from Malaysia – and also that Defra are looking to review the AHS Control Strategy.

- g. Strangles. RN noted the ongoing debate around the validity of various screening tests, including the use of the Elisa test for pre-movements to livery yards. DM noted that an EVJ paper on this subject is shortly due for publication.
 - h. Equine Infectious Anaemia. AG raised a potential issue with non-negative/false-positive test results and identified a need to work with policy colleagues to clarify actions when these occurred.
7. Regulatory update
- a. Equine ID and CED. LK reported that the use of the Equine Register digital stable by owners to update their CED details (in England & Wales) had been announced by the Defra Minister at the National Equine Forum in March – but a final proposal on this is still outstanding. LK queried how this would work with ScotEquine – this is to be confirmed. There is also an issue in the different cut-off dates for compulsory microchipping between England, Scotland and Wales (from this October to next Spring) – but there had been discussions to make the initial period from October advisory for England – which could then link in with the Scottish deadline. As this advisory period will not be formalised by a change in the legislation, LK raised the concern that the delay in compulsory retrospective microchipping could have a

future knock-on effect in terms of the number of horses that will be automatically signed out of the food chain. SC noted that there is still no requirement for compulsory microchipping in Northern Ireland – and that work is ongoing to ensure the transfer of data from ROI PIOs holding information on horses resident in Northern Ireland to the UK CED..

LE raised the issue of a lack of keeper address on the CED – and the issues this will raise for disease control purposes since so many animals are not kept with their owners. She highlighted that The Donkey Sanctuary had worked with Defra on this issue since so many of the TDS donkeys are in foster homes around the country. It was suggested that this approach could be recommended to other rehoming charities. LK noted that the ScotEquine smartcards had the option for additional information (including keeper details) but AK confirmed that this additional information was not compulsory.

- b. Animal Health Regulation. HR reported that some delegated Acts have been published and discussions are ongoing but Defra have not been centrally involved as the UK has now left the EU. The Defra team are currently reviewing implementation and revising disease control measures to achieve the outcome in terms of disease control as the AHR. A key issue is where the equine is habitually kept.
 - c. Animal Welfare (Licencing of activities involving animals) (England) Regulations 2018. BM reported that the RCVS sub-committee on Riding Establishments has paused all current courses and will be moving all 2021 courses online. The committee is also re-writing all guidelines including providing templates on issues such as biosecurity – but stressed that these would be very topline.
 - d. Traceability Design User Group (TDUG). Nothing additional to report.
 - e. Proposed Licensing of Sanctuaries and Rehoming Centres in England, Scotland & Wales. LK said that Defra are currently evidence gathering before going out to consultation on a proposal. The Scottish Government are not currently considering including equines in this regulation – focusing solely on small animals.
 - f. Welfare in Transport. RO noted that this issue was a manifesto commitment for the UK Government and the first step was reviewing the substantial Animal Welfare Committee (FAWC as was) opinion on transport. The Scottish and Welsh Governments had already released a joint response on this report – awaiting response from Defra.
8. EU-UK future relationship. The deadline for the end of the transition period currently remains at 31 Dec 20 and there currently does not seem any likelihood of this being extended.
 9. Biosecurity Behaviour Change Project. LK reported that up until March good progress had been made. Following the completion of the livery yard surveys and discussions with the Behavioural Insights Team it had been agreed to run a workshop with grassroots participants (inc. livery yard owners, vets, horse owners (with and without experience of disease outbreaks) to help decide on the pilot intervention to be trialled. This workshop had been arranged for 20 May but has been postponed due to Covid-19. It is unclear when we will be able to rearrange this event so the project is currently on hold.
 10. Equine Medicines. No Covid-19 related shortages were noted.

11. Update from related groups/initiatives

- a. Animal Health and Welfare Board for England. RO reported that Martin Jenkins (Defra) had reported to a recent meeting of the British Horse Council Directors on the thinking behind the Animal Health and Welfare Pathways. It is very much looking at a post-CAP world – and the aim is for the pathway for each species to be co-designed with industry –to implement systems that create gradual improvement over time – for example through management of a particular endemic disease or through a health management system. Equines are unlikely to be focused on before 2022 so there is time for the sector to consider what might work best.
- b. British Horse Council. Nothing further to report.
- c. Equine Stakeholder Group for Scotland. Last met in November 2018 but is due to meet again soon.
- d. DARD strategy development. SC reported that The Deloitte report on the equine industry provided an assessment of the economic value of the NI equine sector. It concluded that the current structures in place across the industry and in the public sector were not working well and made a series of recommendations. Due to the cross-cutting nature of the industry a Cross-governmental Strategy Steering Group has been established with membership from across central government Departments in order to consider the findings and recommendations of the Deloitte Analysis. The Group have met once and are currently considering how best each department can engage with the sector. The next stage is to consider how best DAERA can input into the strategy.
- e. AHT Equine Industry Committee. The Committee last met on 20 Feb and is currently due to meet again on Wed 16 Sep.

12. AOB. None raised.

13. Date of next meeting – 9.30am on Wed 4 Nov – either via Zoom or at the BHA offices.