



Press Release

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New HBLB Veterinary Science Research and Education Awards starting in 2023, New VAC Appointments and 2023 Application Round

The Horserace Betting Levy Board (HBLB) will be investing £2.5m in its disease surveillance, veterinary science and education programme starting in 2023 (2022: £2.6m). The commitment underlines the importance of this key area for the sport and for the benefit of the Thoroughbred.

For 2023, in addition to the continuing Infectious Disease Surveillance Programmes, the new activity supported, which is listed in full at the end of this release, includes:

- 7 Major Research Projects
- 2 Research Scholarships
- 6 Small Research Projects
- 1 Clinical Scholarship

HBLB is also pleased to recognise the valued contributions being made by:

- The Racing Foundation, which will again be supporting equine veterinary scientific research, providing £200,000 split between two major projects.
- The Thoroughbred Breeders' Association (TBA), the Gerald Leigh Charitable Trust and the British European Breeders' Fund, which, together, are funding the small project awards.

In addition, both the TBA and Racehorse Owners Association (ROA) contribute towards the essential Equine Infectious Disease Surveillance work.

HBLB's Veterinary Advisory Committee (VAC) will continue to manage all ongoing work.

Alan Delmonte, Chief Executive of the Levy Board, said:

"We are very pleased to announce the appointment of Professor Matthew Allen as Chair of the Veterinary Advisory Committee. Matthew, the Professor of Small Animal Surgery at Cambridge, already makes a significant contribution through his membership of the Committee and this will be enhanced further in his new role. He takes over from Professor Sandy Love who led the Committee so effectively from the start of 2017. Sandy devoted a lot of time to the VAC and its work. His stature in scientific circles undoubtedly enhanced the reputation of the VAC. The Board is very grateful for his contribution. "

Professor Matthew Allen, Chair of the HBLB's VAC, said:

"Maintaining strength in depth in new equine veterinary research initiatives is absolutely essential for the health and wellbeing of our horses. In selecting the projects and scholarships to recommend for funding, the HBLB's VAC insists that the programmes are both scientifically robust and directly relevant to the racing, breeding and rearing of Thoroughbreds. As always, the quality of applications this year was extremely impressive, making the selection process very difficult. The VAC is delighted that, with the support of our funding partners, we will be able to initiate some very promising work in 2023 covering a diverse and interesting range of topics across the HBLB's key research priority areas.

"The new work is listed below.

"I'm pleased to report that HBLB is stepping up its collaboration with overseas equine scientific research foundations with the aim of increasing effective information exchange, and developing new and better ways of translating Thoroughbred research outcomes to the wider industry. More will be revealed as the year progresses.

"I wish to add to Alan's words in thanking Sandy for his excellent leadership of the VAC. We would not be in our current healthy state without his engagement, leadership and scientific/clinical input. I am glad that he is staying as a member to take us through to the next stage.

"Many thanks are also due to Professors Colin Farquharson, Chris Proudman and Falko Steinbach, all of whose terms with the VAC ended during the last twelve months. All will be hugely missed, but we have great confidence that the new Committee line-up will carry on taking us forward. I am particularly grateful too to Professor Tom Stout for agreeing to take over from Colin as Deputy Chair of the VAC.

"The 2023 application round, for awards to start in 2024/25, will open on 16 May."

Rob Hezel, Chief Executive of The Racing Foundation, said:

"The Racing Foundation's purpose is to support Racing by acting as a catalyst and a funder of improvement. Horse welfare is one of our key areas of focus and part of this specifically includes our investment in equine science research, which now totals over £1.7million. This has been used to fund a range of different projects with the ultimate aim of using findings to positively impact Thoroughbred health and welfare.



"This year we are supporting two new projects.

"Drawing on work in human medicine, the Birmingham University study aims to identify an easy-to-use method of establishing whether a horse has suffered a concussion. This will be invaluable in helping to decide what to do when a horse falls, how it should be treated immediately after and what to watch out for when it has left the racecourse.

"The increasing over reliance on the current range of antibiotics has been concerning the equine world for some time. Just as with humans, antimicrobial resistance is a growing problem and, without a solution, it is likely that currently treatable conditions could become life threatening. The Racing Foundation will be co-funding, with the Levy Board, a new project at the University of Edinburgh looking to develop novel alternative approaches focusing on tackling bacterial infection and boosting immunity.

"We are delighted to be working alongside the Levy Board, the TBA, the Gerald Leigh Charitable Trust and the British European Breeders' Fund, helping to demonstrate the Racing Industry's commitment to Thoroughbred health and wellbeing."



Claire Sheppard, Chief Executive of the TBA, said:

"The TBA is pleased to be partnering with both the Gerald Leigh Charitable Trust and the British EBF in co-funding three short research projects of specific interest to thoroughbred breeders. Equine Herpesvirus-1 can present a risk of neurological disease to all types and ages of horse, but is of additional concern on stud farms due to the threat of pregnancy loss. Similarly, endometritis can also compromise the reproductive health of broodmares and any further insight to tackling this issue whilst also limiting any unnecessary use of antimicrobials, would be

most beneficial to breeders and their attending veterinary surgeons. Stud management teams are also conscious of the increasing threat of anthelmintic resistance and any support in preserving the efficacy of the dewormer drugs available would be greatly appreciated, with this project aiming to identify individual strongyle species for more focused targeting of treatments. We look forward to supporting Ashley Roberts, Camilla Scott and Colin Butter in the delivery of these exciting projects."

From Sarah Whitney of the Gerald Leigh Charitable Trust:

The Gerald Leigh Charitable Trust

"The Gerald Leigh Charitable Trust is very pleased to continue its financial support of veterinary research for the benefit of the Thoroughbred Industry. This year, we will be supporting a total of five Small Grant Projects as part of the HBLB's Equine Science Veterinary Research programme, two of which will be jointly funded with the TBA. We believe that there are some very interesting research topics which could potentially lead on to larger studies in the future. We very much consider that welfare of the thoroughbred racehorse and improvement of the breed are of paramount importance to our Bloodstock Industry".

From Simon Sweeting, Chairman, British EBF:

"As part of its support of the British Thoroughbred, the British European Breeders' Fund (EBF) has wholly or partly funded veterinary research projects totalling £1.5million, covering subjects as diverse as the Equine Genome Project and virulence factors associated with Rhodococcus equi. We are delighted to co-fund this exciting, much needed research into Equine Herpes Virus (EHV) by Dr Ashley Roberts with the HBLB and the TBA, and the possible use of competitive inhibitors to overcome future challenges to the horse population's immunity to it."



Comment from James Given, BHA Director of Equine Health and Welfare:

"British racing is committed to the highest standards of horse welfare and constantly enhancing our safety record. The HBLB has funded important research for many years, principally for the benefit of horseracing and the thoroughbred population, but to the advantage also of the wider equine community."

"Ongoing scientific research has a central role to play in our collective efforts: improving our understanding, identifying opportunities and informing practical measures that support the well-being of our horses and enable our sport to thrive."

HBLB Equine Scientific and Education Awards 2023

(BEBF = British European Breeders' Fund; GLCT = The Gerald Leigh Charitable Trust; RF = The Racing Foundation; TBA = Thoroughbred Breeders' Association)

Major Projects		Project Title	Funding Partners
Dr Yu-Mei Chang	Royal Veterinary College (RVC)	Harnessing deep learning methods for improved fracture detection in Thoroughbreds	
Dr Cristina Esteves	Edinburgh	Exploring novel stem cell tools to combat equine infection - towards the reduction of antibiotic usage and antimicrobial resistance	RF
Dr Valentina Pietro	Birmingham	Equine concussion has risks to horse and rider – how salivary microRNAs might help diagnosis	RF
Prof Chris Proudman	Surrey	Next Generation Probiotics - 'Omics-based Identification of candidate bacteria	
Dr Scott Roberts	RVC	A periosteal cell therapy for the treatment of equine osteochondritis dissecans	
Dr Chavaunne Thorpe	RVC	Defining the contribution of microvascular cells to tendon health and ageing	
Prof Michael Tildesley	Warwick	Adaptive modelling for emerging equine vector borne viruses	
Small Projects		Project Title	
Dr Dagmar Berner	RVC	Exploring inertial sensing technology to quantify gait symmetry in Thoroughbred foals before and after corrective trimming for angular limb deformities	GLCT
Dr Colin Butter	Lincoln	Validation and development of molecular tools to identify specific equine strongyle species and associated anthelmintic resistance markers	TBA/GLCT
Dr Anna Karagianni	Edinburgh	Applying novel-omic approaches to investigate equine airway immunity	GLCT
Prof Mandy Peffers	Liverpool	Can MSC-derived extracellular vesicles rescue the joint phenotype in an advanced 3D <i>in vitro</i> model of equine osteoarthritis?	GLCT
Dr Ashley Roberts	Lincoln	Can peptides derived from Equine Herpesvirus-1 proteins act as competitive inhibitors of viral replication by blocking essential protein-protein interactions?	TBA/BEBF
Dr Camilla Scott	RosSDales	Prevalence of acute infectious and persistent breeding induced endometritis in UK Thoroughbred mares post cover	TBA/GLCT
Research Scholarships			
Dr Alistair Brown	Newcastle	Drug discovery targeting horse respiratory pathogens <i>Antibacterial agents and new targets to treat bronchopneumonia in foals</i>	
Dr Debbie Guest	RVC	Tendon Inflammation; Epigenetics; and Regenerative Medicine <i>Do horse tendon cells become primed to inflammation?</i>	
Clinical Scholarship			
Prof Bruce McGorum	Edinburgh	Multi-omics investigation of the >30kDa putative causal neurotoxin present in serum/plasma from horses with acute equine grass sickness.	

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Notes for editors:

The [Horserace Betting Levy Board](#) (HBLB) is a statutory body operating in accordance with the provisions of the Betting, Gaming and Lotteries Act 1963 (as amended). Its purpose is to assess and collect monetary contributions from bookmakers via a levy, which it distributes for the improvement of horseracing and breeds of horses, and for the advancement of veterinary science and education.

The outcomes of HBLB-funded work are published in peer reviewed scientific journals. The format for publishing lay summaries of funded work is under revision.

In 2012 [The Racing Foundation](#) was established to oversee the distribution of funds to charitable causes within the racing and thoroughbred industries following the sale of the Tote. Since inception it has awarded £30million in grants. People, equine welfare, community engagement and environment and emerging issues are the key areas of focus in [the latest strategy](#). The Trustees of the Racing Foundation are Julia Budd (Chair), Linda Bowles, Jim Boyle, Susannah Gill, Louise Kemble, Alice Page, Rishi Persad and Algy Smith-Maxwell. The British Horseracing Authority, the Horsemen's Group and Racecourse Association are the three joint Members of the Racing Foundation, which is registered with the Charity Commission as a charity under the law of England and Wales (no. 1145297). [@RacingGrants](http://www.racingfoundation.co.uk)

[The Thoroughbred Breeders' Association](#) was established in 1917 and remains committed to the long-term future of the British Thoroughbred and the interests of the British breeder. The charity strives to safeguard the health and welfare of the Thoroughbred for the overall improvement of the breed. This includes delivering training and education opportunities to ensure best practice on stud farms, veterinary research to maintain the highest health standards, and the encouragement of diversity within the breed for a stronger, more resilient Thoroughbred. The Thoroughbred Breeders' Association (registered as a charitable company in England; company number 07073259, charity number 1134293).

[The Gerald Leigh Charitable Trust](#) was established in 1974 and, since its inception, has made regular donations to a range of worthy causes which focused on bloodstock, medical research and education. For many years, the Trust has been pleased to support various veterinary research projects which still remain one of its key charitable objectives moving forward. Gerald Leigh was a prominent owner breeder of racehorses based at Eydon Hall Farm in Northamptonshire. He established himself as a leading international breeder by developing strong families with a small but select band of broodmares. On the racecourse he achieved Classic and Group 1 winners throughout the world. In 1994, his homebred, Baratheia won the Breeders' Cup Mile in a course record and in 1990, Markofdistinction delivered a first Group 1 success for jockey Frankie Dettori in the Queen Elizabeth Stakes at Ascot. Among Mr Leigh's commercial successes in the sales ring, his broodmare Korveya sold for a world-record \$7 million in 1998.

The [British European Breeders' Fund](#) has contributed over £31.5million to the sport since 1983 and has a current investment level of around £1.7million per year over both flat and National Hunt racing making the BEBF the third largest sponsor of horseracing in the country.

2023 Application Round

The [Horserace Betting Levy Board](#) (HBLB) is inviting applications for equine veterinary research and education grants to start from April 2024. Applications open on **16 May 2023**. The website and links will not be activated before then, so do not try to access before midday on 16 May.

The HBLB's strategic research priorities are aligned with the outcomes of the Horse Welfare Board's strategic plan for the welfare of horses bred for racing (2020-2024):

- ❖ *Best possible quality of life, which include all aspects of healthcare, husbandry and disease control (e.g. improved methods of disease diagnosis, more effective vaccines, biosecurity and disease prevention strategies, antimicrobial and anthelmintic resistance)*
- ❖ *Best possible safety and well-being during breeding, training and racing (e.g. enhancement of diagnostic methods and restoration techniques after musculo-skeletal disease and injury, safer training and racing practices, minimisation of fatal and non-fatal injury)*
- ❖ *Lifetime responsibility for equine health (e.g. optimal health of breeding Thoroughbreds and youngstock, reproductive efficiency, evaluation of factors affecting transition to post-racing careers)*

All applications will be subject to the normal HBLB review process.
There are five award types:

RESEARCH PROJECT GRANTS

Application deadline is 2pm on Tuesday 11 July 2023

The HBLB supports scientifically robust research projects to benefit the racing, breeding and rearing of the Thoroughbred. Innovative and novel research approaches are encouraged and all applications will be subject to peer review and full evaluation by the Board's VAC.

Applications are made online via the HBLB's [Equine Grants System](#). Visit the 'Advancing Veterinary Science and Education' section on the HBLB website for information on:

- Research priorities and scope
- Eligibility
- Applications
- Other activity in the veterinary sphere

SMALL PROJECT GRANTS

Application deadline is 2pm on Monday 11 September 2023

This fund supports research focusing on specific issues of direct and immediate practical importance to the Thoroughbred. The grants are open to individuals employed by veterinary schools, universities and research institutes, veterinary practitioners or elsewhere in the Thoroughbred racing and breeding industry. HBLB is particularly interested in receiving applications from clinicians, farriers and others involved directly in the care of horses. Projects are limited to one year with costs restricted to around £10,000.

For full information and to apply, please download an application pack and form from the 'Advancing Veterinary Science and Education' section on www.hblb.org.uk.

EDUCATION AWARDS

Application deadline is 2pm on Tuesday 11 July 2023

The two types of scholarships are as follows:

- **Veterinary Research Training Scholarships** offer four-year funding to pursue a PhD programme in any scientific or veterinary field relevant to equines and particularly the racing, breeding or rearing of Thoroughbreds.

Research Training Scholarships are open to veterinary graduates or non-veterinary science graduates. The requirements regarding the subject of the PhD will be the same for graduates in either discipline.

- **Senior Equine Clinical Scholarships** allow veterinary graduates with at least two years' practical experience to train for a higher qualification, such as a European Diploma, over four years. The qualification must be in an equine field with particular relevance to the Thoroughbred.

Applications for both types of award must be made by the prospective supervisor within an eligible institution, such as a university veterinary school, other university department or research institute. Awards include a tax-free stipend to cover living costs and an expense allowance for research costs and other purposes directly relevant to the scholarship.

For full information and to apply, please download an application pack and form from the 'Advancing Veterinary Science and Education' section on www.hblb.org.uk.

EQUINE POST-DOCTORAL FELLOWSHIP

Application deadline is 2pm on Tuesday 11 July 2023

The HBLB is again inviting applications from recent veterinary PhD graduates for a post-doctoral fellowship. Introduced in 2016, the Equine Post-Doctoral Fellowships are aimed at exceptional veterinary PhDs, with the skills and aptitude to develop a leading academic or clinical academic career in equine veterinary sciences. The area of research must be focused on Thoroughbred racing, breeding or rearing. The fellowship will be tenable for three years.

For full information and to apply, please download an application pack and form from the 'Advancing Veterinary Science and Education' section on www.hblb.org.uk.

For further information please contact Annie Dodd, Grants Manager at the Levy Board, at equine.grants@hblb.org.uk.