EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Women’s representation and diversity in the horseracing industry

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Introduction

Women are slowly gaining status within many male-dominated professions. However, the sports sector is one where women continue to be underrepresented. This is the case throughout the horseracing industry, where women are underrepresented in senior management and board positions, and within the higher levels of roles such as jockeys, trainers, owners, breeders and stable staff. The issue of gender diversity has become more prominent in the UK in recent years, reflecting ongoing government and business community concerns about loss of talent and a need to have the best leadership capability to be globally competitive.

Diversity is key for both fairness reasons and also business performance. Research shows a clear positive correlation between gender workplace diversity and organisational performance. Business benefits include improved financial performance, increased customer retention and greater ability to innovate and generate new ideas.

British horseracing is broad and complex and contributes a significant amount to the UK economy, through activities which include racecourses, media operations and racehorse owners’ training. The industry is also a significant, employer providing jobs for over 20,000 full and part-time staff. It is important to understand the current role of women in racing and their career experiences if a more diverse environment and the associated benefits can be realised for horseracing.

The project

The Centre for Diversity Policy Research and Practice at Oxford Brookes University undertook this research, sponsored by The Racing Foundation and supported by Women in Racing. Members of which formed the steering group. The overall aims of this project were to: investigate gender diversity and women’s representation in leadership roles across the industry; investigate their careers in the racing industry; and identify barriers to and enabling factors for achieving leadership roles. The study used a three-stage approach:

- **STAGE 1** Desk-based research using existing academic literature and publicly-available materials on government and horseracing industry web-sites to examine the key issues surrounding women’s careers and underrepresentation in senior roles.
- **STAGE 2** Development and distribution of an on-line questionnaire to collect data on people working at all levels and roles within horseracing and obtain a wide range of input on their experiences. The survey attracted 393 participants from across the horseracing community. Women represented 79.4% of participants and 18.8% were male with a wide range of ages and job roles.
- **STAGE 3** Semi-structured telephone interviews with 16 key industry stakeholders (both male and female) who were invited to interview by members of the steering group.

FINDINGS

HORSERACING: A RAPIDLY EVOLVING INDUSTRY

The industry has undergone significant change over recent decades, due to modernisation and expansion. Women have been increasingly prominent.

Challenges to the industry include staff shortages, particularly in training yards and partly due to government immigration policy. There are also exciting new opportunities such as ways to market the industry through social media.

Career structures can be complex, with many in the industry holding multiple roles and having a life-long interest. This is a challenge for those without family backgrounds in the sport or who cannot undertake unpaid roles to gain experience and grow networks. Individuals remaining in roles for a long time can constrain career progression for others.

Diversification of the industry has broadened the skills-base needed, opening up opportunities for women, though often in more traditionally ‘female areas’ such as HR or the charitable sector. Powerful stereotypes remain, with women often associated with caring and nurturing rather than strategy or governance.

Although the industry contains progressive thinkers, some also felt it is ‘inward-looking’, overly traditional and conservative, which can create barriers to entry.

Some areas remain male-dominated, and women from across the industry report being patronised, not being taken seriously or being denied opportunities because of their gender. Some report an ‘old boys’ network’ with practices which exclude women, though others argue that horseracing is a meritocracy. Many held a ‘centre ground’ view that, on the whole, the industry is a meritocracy which welcomes dedication and hard workers, but some corners experience entrenched prejudice and discrimination.

The low number of professional female jockeys presents a concern.

Existing educational centres of excellence are key entry points into the industry, acting as a springboard to different roles. Education and training providers have a role in re-skilling and training individuals.

1. http://www.racingfoundation.co.uk
2. http://www.womeninracing.co.uk
THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT

More could be done to support women through, and improve negative attitudes towards, pregnancy and maternity. Losing women at this stage is a drain on talent and industry resources. For some areas of the industry, particularly small businesses and/or working with animals, there is less scope for flexible or part-time work.

Career-constraining factors for employees include the need to travel and shift work (particularly split shifts) which can dictate where you live and limit access to good quality childcare. Low pay can make childcare unaffordable.

Freelance work presents specific challenges to women because of a lack of paid maternity leave or support for returning to the workplace. It also restricts access to training and networking opportunities.

Several participants reported inappropriate behaviour and bullying with a ‘banter’ culture (particularly in yards) including ageist, sexist, racist and homophobic abuse. Some were unable to access necessary support to deal with this.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT

Almost half of survey participants had not received any helpful career advice. Lack of opportunity for career progression was a concern across the industry.

Mentoring is particularly useful for understanding the complexities of the industry and helping to build credibility. Many reported positive and useful experiences, and where no mentor was available this was a key career constraint. Several women highlighted the importance of women supporting one another and also the important role of WiR in this respect.

Networks are key for career development, and a significant career enabler. It is important to be proactive in building networks, including friendship networks and contacts outside of the industry. Some networks, including male-only events and clubs, exclude women and create an area of disadvantage.

There is a wide range of training and development available at all levels of the industry. These may be closed to some, for example, because of cost. Retraining opportunities are important, for example, for women with childcare needs or individuals who need to change role because of injury. There is some industry support for retraining grants.

ROLE SPECIFIC FINDINGS

WOMEN IN SENIOR AND BOARD POSITIONS

There are mixed perceptions on gender balance at senior levels. All agreed there had been progress. However, views were polarised between those who felt women have equal opportunities and those who felt barriers remain.

Analysis shows that women are better represented on charitable boards than other types, with 34% of total trustee board membership being female. Other boards, including those integral to industry governance have less female representation: women constitute 16% of these boards, with five boards having no women at all.

It was argued that developing an understanding of diversity should form part of leadership training within the industry.

A number of women had been made to feel unwelcome when considering applying for more senior roles. Some had been specifically told that women would not be promoted.

Female role models are seen as exceptionally important for showing younger women that success is possible, particularly those who have successfully balanced family life and career and/or influence institutional practices.

Executive search firms (‘headhunters’) have a role in recruiting board members and senior staff, and may be able to contribute to increasing diversity.

RACING ADMINISTRATION AND GOVERNING BODIES

Governing bodies have an important role in addressing equality issues. The BHA is seen to have led the way by restructuring its board for greater diversity.

The BHA has further demonstrated good practice through building diversity considerations into leadership training and reviewing its HR processes.

Governing bodies have a role in promoting diversity through employees on the ground: these are the public face of the sport.

Maintaining diverse representation in governing bodies can be a challenge where key stakeholder groups are unable to provide female representatives.

Racecourse management was identified as a more progressive area of the industry because of its commercial and customer-facing nature.

The sectoral focus on mainstream entertainment and leisure requires a broader skills set, allowing for greater progression of a more diverse workforce.

The large number of racecourses allows greater opportunities for career progression. Job roles can be more flexible and fit with childcare.

Many talented women were identified as progressing into key roles, including chief executives, though there is still a bottleneck at senior level and underrepresentation of women in director and executive roles.
## Women's Representation and Diversity in the Horseracing Industry

### Jockeys

Despite higher numbers of young women than men entering the ‘pipeline’ through colleges, etc, the majority of professional jockeys are male.

Several participants expressed a belief that, whilst becoming a successful jockey is difficult for all, women have additional barriers to overcome, including prejudice and having fewer opportunities to ride.

Some argue that women are less successful because they are physically weaker or less willing to undertake the gruelling training regime. Others dispute this, maintaining that strategy, technique, balance, rhythm and empathy with the horse are more important than strength.

### Stable Staff

Greater numbers of women than ever are coming into the industry and colleges are a primary source to ‘feed’ the yards, with a ratio of at least 60:40 girls to boys moving towards 70:30.

There is a shortage of stable staff despite success in raising awareness of horseracing as a career option. Employers are unlikely to discriminate between males and females when selecting staff provided they meet key criteria of riding well and being willing to work hard.

Universal issues for concern amongst staff are low pay, long hours, high turnover and little room for progression.

### Breeders/Bloodstock

Breeding and bloodstock are seen as a particular area of success for women. Available figures show close to half of registered breeders are male and a little under a fifth are female (though gender data is not available for all).

There is a perception that women have greater empathy with animals and are better at nurturing and caring roles. Increased numbers of women were identified in traditionally ‘masculine’ roles such as machine maintenance.

Breeders are required to stick with their business in one location, which some argued may not fit well with women whose partners must move for work.

### Owners

Owners, in addition to trainers, can make the careers of jockeys through their role in decision-making processes. They are important for promoting good equality and diversity practices by taking an interest in the way yards operate.

Some felt that sole owners belong to a more ‘traditional’ demographic, and that a move towards more syndicated ownership may change this. Participants identified that the number of Middle Eastern owners may present cultural barriers to selecting women jockeys.

Women owners are represented in the top ten for both jump and flat racing.

### Trainers

Training is seen as a more traditional and hierarchical area of the industry. Trainers have a pivotal function in the careers of jockeys.

Some participants had experience of trainers who discourage or even refuse to work with female jockeys. Suggestions included that trainers make assumptions about women’s abilities or desire for the role.

Though training was identified as an area where women do well there were no women amongst the top ten flat or jump trainers during 2015.

### Stable Staff

Factors suggested for reluctance to promote female jockeys include a perceived dislike of seeing women injured and concerns they will leave the role early to have children. Some felt that the intimidating nature of the weighing room or high levels of criticism may put off aspiring female riders.

Several features of the job may discourage women who aspire to have a family, including the extensive travelling required, lack of a secure income, no access to maternity pay and long hours.

Positive aspects include the encouragement, support and camaraderie amongst jockeys and the number of talented female jockeys who are emerging.

### Breeders/Bloodstock

The industry has not always been good at recognising and rewarding staff achievements, but some stated that this is improving.

Some argued that the physical nature of the work means women often move on whilst men tend to ‘survive’ and progress to more senior roles. High levels of female stable staff who took part in the survey did not have children, though of those who did only a fifth felt it had constrained their career.

Some who had moved on from yard work to other roles within the industry had struggled to make that transition. Others, though, felt that yard work develops valuable skills such as teamwork and communicating at all levels.

### Owners

Female vets generally reported good experiences, though a small number had received disrespectful and unpleasant comments because of their gender.

A very small number had experienced direct prejudice and been told that women are not capable of being racing vets. Some were constrained by being limited to amateur clients rather than higher status, professional clients.

Others identified that some trainers prefer to work with a female vet, and that prejudice will diminish as women become more prevalent in the role.
RACING MEDIA

Some aspects of the racing media, such as television, are perceived to be more male-dominated. Gender balance is improving along with wider social trends and political interest in the subject of representation, though horseracing is a little behind other sports.

Women in print media are perceived to be concentrated in particular areas such as bloodstock.

As freelance work is not uncommon in media roles, more women are potentially affected by the issues mentioned under ‘The Working Environment’ above, such as no maternity pay.

OTHER AREAS OF DIVERSITY

Age was a cause of less favourable treatment, including younger women who felt constrained in their careers and need support for career development.

Issues relating to support for males mainly concerned needs around physical well-being, particularly for older males in the industry long-term.

Shortages in stable staff provide opportunities for bringing in older workers who have never been involved in yard work. Age diverse teams can present challenges, but also open up possibilities for inter-generational skills sharing.

It was widely acknowledged that, with the exception of some stable staff and jockeys, the industry is predominantly white. Causes identified included government immigration policies and the rural nature of horseracing.

Low numbers reported disability as a barrier. Smaller employers, in particular, meet challenges in providing suitable facilities, though there were also positive reports about the support received for injury and illness.

Geographical location is a major constraint on career progression for some, for example, lack of access to childcare in remote areas.

KEY ISSUES IDENTIFIED

Reflections and implications

The horseracing industry is changing rapidly through modernisation and expansion. It will be better equipped to meet the resulting challenges if it welcomes people from all backgrounds, allows talent to thrive and appeals to a wide customer base.

- Time and again the importance of nurturing the ‘pipeline’ of talent has been highlighted. Where barriers exist, whether tangible or intangible, individuals face career constraints or leave meaning lost talent and potential.

- Views about difficulties or disadvantage that women face were polarised, with some feeling very strongly that there is prejudice and discrimination in many areas of the industry. Others felt equally strongly that this is not the case and that women who do not succeed have either ‘chosen’ family as an alternative or are not sufficiently committed or talented. Some identified a proliferation of talented and successful women in horseracing as proof that there is gender equality. We would argue, however, that a female presence is not the same as women being fully represented in a way which reflects overall participation rates.

- The low numbers of women in more senior and executive roles challenges the view that there is a consistent meritocracy. Stereotypes and conceptions of merit, and ideas of what a leader ‘looks like’, can create barriers to women moving up the career ladder.

- The industry demonstrates vertical segregation, with high numbers of men in many senior roles. Higher representation of women on charitable and non-profit boards, where they are so heavily underrepresented on other boards shows a concentration of women within caring or empathetic roles. A prevailing view that women have greater talent for caring roles can be career-constraining if this labels them as being less ‘business-like’.

- Some maintain that women choose to focus in particular career areas. However, these roles may attract more women simply because they offer the best chance of success. The fact that several female participants had faced hostility when considering more senior roles may indicate that they are less likely to be offered prestigious or governing roles. This loss of talent is compounded when women cannot combine a career with childcare responsibilities.

- The issues raised are not confined to horseracing: many of the concerns identified by this research both resonate with and corroborate themes in existing research. This includes, for example a concentration of women in caring or low-risk roles and senior women not receiving opportunities to progress to executive levels.

- Other sectors which recognise these issues are taking steps to address them. In the UK, for example, the work of the Davies Committee brought about a significant increase in the numbers of women at the most senior levels in FTSE companies. They set targets to drive progress with a voluntary, business-led approach. This created a direction of travel where the demonstrable benefits of diversity are apparent to all.

- Horseracing faces challenges because of its diverse and wide-spread nature which can make it difficult to enact change. In addition, smaller employers may be unable to provide structured development in contrast to larger ones with more resources. Therefore, changes for horseracing must be industry-led to allow the necessary support. In addition, wide stakeholder representation is needed to ensure cross-organisational consistency.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
**Next steps**

Suggested 'next steps' for improving gender diversity in leadership roles and addressing some of the career barriers women face are as follows:

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<th>Taking forward the diversity agenda</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Build a greater understanding of diversity issues</strong></td>
<td>Establish an independent steering body to act as champions in supporting the industry in its efforts. It could be viable for the BHA, as the sport’s governing body, to lead on this initiative if other organisations, including the Racecourse Association and Horsemen’s Group, offered their full support.</td>
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<td><strong>Increase understanding of gender and other diversity across the industry</strong></td>
<td>Develop a set of industry-wide voluntary diversity targets. Develop monitoring mechanisms to better understand the makeup of individuals involved in the industry and their career paths. For example, expand on the BHA annual statistics.</td>
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<th>Career development and support</th>
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<td><strong>Address career development and advice needs across the industry</strong></td>
<td>Recognise the importance of mentoring and develop industry-standard guidelines on mentoring.</td>
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<td>Explore different ways of cross-industry mentoring to give individuals greater opportunities for contact with a broader range of career experiences, using the success of WiR as a model.</td>
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<td>Raise the visibility of successful women in the industry, taking advantage of existing role models to encourage younger women.</td>
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<td>Encourage successful women to share their career stories through existing media, e.g. print, and social media.</td>
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<td>Draw on both industry and other sources of guidance for career development, such as the BHA’s Careers in Racing website[^3^], or the Racing Welfare 24 Hour Helpline[^4^].</td>
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<td>Develop a source of travel grants for career development purposes for those constrained by geographical location.</td>
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<td>Look at ways to increase clarity about career progression; support structured, industry-wide development paths.</td>
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<td>Explore ways to achieve greater consistency in career-based training and development opportunities; share good practice.</td>
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<td>Communicate the development opportunities available, to both employers and employees, including courses and funding sources.</td>
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[^3^]: http://www.careersinracing.com/
[^4^]: http://www.racingwelfare.co.uk/
## Senior level development and recruitment

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<th>Address the shortage of women in leadership positions without tokenism</th>
<th>Focus on nurturing the pipeline through shadowing and mentoring opportunities for women below executive level; encourage bodies and organisations to consider diversifying board representation.</th>
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<td>Consider the role of executive search firms when making appointments; explore their code of conduct for recruiting women.</td>
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## Work-life balance and pastoral care

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<th>Address issues around access to childcare</th>
<th>Explore the possibility of racing hubs, for example, Newmarket, Lambourn, Middleham and Malton assisting with childcare provision.</th>
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<td>Ensure employees understand fully their rights in relation to maternity leave, flexible working, etc</td>
<td>Ensure that rights around areas such as flexible working are communicated widely and consistently across the industry, both to employers and employees.</td>
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<td>Ensure existing material informing employees of their rights and sources of help and support are well-publicised and accessible.</td>
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<td>Challenge any existing negative attitudes around diversity and enable all managers to understand what is required of them</td>
<td>Tackle unconscious bias through existing training programmes at all levels of the sport, including the BHA Graduate Scheme and The Racing Industry Course (TRIC).</td>
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<td>Ensure specific courses for trainers, jockeys, stable staff and racing administration which are offered by the British Racing School⁵ and Northern Racing College⁶ build a requirement for some level of diversity, people management and other leadership factors.</td>
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<td>Develop a set of diversity targets to build into performance measures for senior management, where organisations are sufficiently sized to have these structures in place.</td>
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## Address bullying and harassment

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<th>Initiate an industry-wide policy of zero tolerance.</th>
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<td>Ensure that employees across the industry have clear communication and knowledge of routes to advice and support for bullying or harassment, such as the Racing Welfare 24 Hotline⁷.</td>
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<td>Ensure stakeholders work together to look at further ways to collectively monitor, investigate and address possible complaints.</td>
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## SUMMARY

Finally, this work has been carried out at a time when the issue of women in sport is seen as increasingly important. Underrepresentation of women at senior and executive levels is an issue faced by the whole sporting community, as well as wider corporate and business, leaving women underrepresented in some important decision-making structures. By taking the initiative to find out more about this, horseracing has moved a step along the way to addressing such inequalities.

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⁷. http://www.racingwelfare.co.uk