

Equine Veterinary Services

The Equine Behaviour Service



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH
The Royal (Dick) School
of Veterinary Studies

Welcome to the Equine Behaviour Service

The Equine Behaviour Service is run by Gemma Pearson BVMS Cert (AVP) MRCVS, who has over 15 years working with equine behaviour cases. She is one of only a handful of people in the U.K. to have completed the Associate Diploma in Equitation Science.

Gemma is the Veterinary Liaison Officer for the International Society for Equitation Science and travels the world teaching vets, riding instructors and horse owners on how to incorporate evidence based techniques into their training to improve performance or overcome problems.

Equitation science promotes an objective, evidence-based understanding of the welfare of horses during training and competition by applying valid, quantitative scientific methods that can identify which training techniques are ineffective or may result in equine suffering.

Gemma initially worked in our Equine Practice before completing a residency position in the Equine Hospital, including a Master's degree investigating horse-vet interactions. She is now undertaking a PhD investigating the stress response of horses undergoing veterinary care to be able to develop ways in which your horse can be cared for whilst in the hospital in the least stressful way.

Equine Behaviour Service

Why Refer to the Dick Vet?

There are many differing opinions on the best ways to help horses which are aversive to procedures, such as clipping, or that are demonstrating unwanted behaviours, such as bucking.

All retraining of horses at the Dick Vet is based on Learning Theory which involves understanding the processes through which horses learn in order to train them more effectively. What is more, all techniques used are evidence-based and have been shown in scientific studies to be effective and prioritise calmness and relaxation.

How Many Consultations Will a Horse Need?

The number of consultations required is case specific. Horses that have difficulty loading are almost always loading happily within a single session and should continue to load well for life, but for other cases, for example, desensitisation to clippers, it may take 3-6 sessions for a horse to stand calmly to be clipped anywhere on its body.

Ridden problems can be more variable so it may be worth phoning to discuss your horse's problems first, or having an initial consultation to assess the problem.



Typical Referrals

Consultations are taken for:

- Trailer loading or scrabbling when travelling
- Leading difficulties e.g. bargy, pulls, reluctant to lead
- Reluctance to stand still for mounting
- Aggressive behaviour including biting/kicking
- Desensitisation to needles, clippers, farrier, sprays, plastic bags, hose pipes
- Dangerous ridden behaviour e.g. rears, bucks, spins, spooky, naps or bolts
- Other ridden problems e.g. lazy, too strong/pulls, falls in/out
- Separation anxiety
- Management to prevent or reduce stereotypical behaviour
- General nervousness or anxious in hand/ridden

Pain or Behaviour?

The Equine Behaviour Service also works with the other departments in the Equine Hospital to ascertain if a problem behaviour, such as napping, has an underlying physical cause, is a primary behaviour problem or a combination of the two. This multidisciplinary approach with access to state-of-the-art facilities and diagnostic techniques can help to get to the bottom of difficult cases.

Telephone Consultations

We are more than happy to discuss cases over the phone. This may help you decide if a case is suitable for referral or we may be able to give advice on dealing with horses that are needle shy or aversive to other aspects of veterinary care. We can also offer in-house training for a veterinary practice on managing challenging cases safely and effectively.

Please phone **0131 650 6253** and ask to speak to Gemma Pearson.

Referring Cases

If you would like to refer a case, please
phone reception on **0131 650 6253** or
email **EQH@ed.ac.uk**



Dick Vet Equine Behaviour Service

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As part of The University of Edinburgh, the Dick Vet Equine Practice is a not-for-profit organisation.