Responses to Reviewers comments

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the three reviewers for their constructive comments. We think that our manuscript is stronger as a result of the revisions made and hope that you are in agreement.

I have added the suggested changes to the manuscript in red italics and have included any additional text in the rebuttal. Where new references have been added these are shown as [xx] in the text and I have noted the page number, again, within the rebuttal.

I have also added in comments to the manuscript using track changes.

Reviewer 3

The main problem with this study is that almost all the veterinarians were from a veterinary college. This should be mentioned in the discussion because the opinions of track vets are probably very different from those of academics.

We tried to include more track vets but logistically it proved impossible to get them altogether to hold a focus group with them. However the vets we did include, whilst some may be classified as ‘academics’ they do also work in racing yards and deal with injuries and conditions that are a direct result of being a horse in training. The two British Horseracing Authority vets were well positioned to discuss racehorse welfare as it is they who assess horses on the track and before they run, in the paddock. The third vet has international experience of working as a racehorse vet as well as dealing with horses in training in a large successful flat yard. I have added in the following, as you suggest, in the discussion.

Lines 142-144. I have added in

Lines 451-458

The six participants from the Equine Referral Hospital, whilst not directly involved with racing on the racecourse were often dealing with injuries and conditions associated with horses in training and so were well placed to suggest some of the factors that would create the ‘best life’ and what the minimum welfare standards could be for a horse in training. Of the other three vets two worked as veterinary officers for the British Horseracing Authority at the racecourse whilst the third vet worked at specific racecourses, dealing with immediate traumas and also in a large successful flat yard in Newmarket. All three participants could draw on their experiences at the ‘coal face’ when discussing racehorse welfare.

Were the horses under the care of these stakeholders flat or National hunt?

They were from both codes. I have added,
‘Participants with experience in both National Hunt (jump) and flat racing were recruited...’

Results

Results what are these percentages of, Please clarify for the reader.

They are the ‘Proportion of statements per theme’. I have added this to table 2

Track veterinarians should have been included

We tried to include as many different vets as possible. Hopefully I have explained the background of the vets we had attend. (See rebuttal earlier, lines 451-458).

industry experts with no incentive to present to the vet’ not sure what that means. If the chiropractor has seen the horse the vet won’t be called?

I have removed this line as it is quite ambiguous. What the participant was referring to was that in some cases the para-professionals used should be experienced and knowledgeable enough to be able to assess whether a vet is needed or not.

3.3.2 ‘Minimal basic bedding ... limited shavings’ These statements seem to imply that horse should have less rather than more bedding Is that true?

I have clarified this point as the participant was referring to the fact that in some yards staff are limited to the amount of bedding they can use.

Line 274. A minimum welfare standards scenario was more generalised, ‘minimal basic bedding,’ ‘limited shavings, (where staff are limited on the amount of bedding they can put in).

“pastoral care of stable personnel” is this religious support or more economic

I have changed this to,

Line 127. ‘support the workforce of British horseracing’.

what are wind operations?

I have changed this to,

Line 236. ‘surgical procedures associated with upper airway obstructions in horses’

one participant who

Removed from manuscript.

Define MWS and BL on first use of these initials also CPD

I have defined these within the manuscript.

Line 160-161 a flip chart paper divided into two sections marked ‘minimum welfare standards’ (MWS) and ‘best life’ (BL).

Line 327. CPD [continuous professional development]
“racing clearance post stand-downs’”. What does that mean to non race horse reader

Lines 317-319. ...there should be, ‘an agreed set of interventions for racing clearance post stand-downs’. What was implied was that when a horse has fallen or pulled up they should be prevented from running again until they had been checked by a racecourse vet using an agreed protocol...

horse’s horse vs horses should be uniform throughout the sentence. Make all plural

The line has been removed

628 horses’ abilities

Line removed

need reference for turnout and ulcers

I have added the following references,

Lines 520-524. I have added, Turnout was the most contentious issue discussed by participants. At pasture, horses spend most of their day with their heads down close to the ground, grazing and moving [38]. Although the evidence supporting grazing is conflicting continuous access to good quality grass pasture was viewed as ideal in the prevention of gastric ulcers and in the beneficial stretching of the soft tissues along a horse’s back [39, 40].


racing clearance post stand-downs’ don’t know what that means; for example what are stand downs

Lines 317-319. ...there should be, ‘an agreed set of interventions for racing clearance post stand-downs’. What was implied was that when a horse has fallen or pulled up they should be prevented from running again until they had been checked by a racecourse vet using an agreed protocol...

what is CPD

Line 327. CPD [continuous professional development]

Don’t understand how MWS can be zero and Best life 7, but 3 are common to both

Good point. I’ve changed the ‘common to both’ to ‘standard procedures’, which participants thought should be carried out as a matter of course.

Lines 195-6. Eight statements relating to policy and procedures were allocated to standard procedures

where do the18 statements and 14 statements come from

These have been removed
what is cross work and grid work? Flat work I assume means galloping with no fences.

Lines 240-243. In this scenario some form of exercise would be daily where work routines could be varied, an ‘exercise regime to suit individual horse’ with ‘some form of “cross training”, (conditioning exercise not specific to racehorse training) for example basic flat work (elementary schooling exercise)

I have removed grid work

784 best of his ability

Line 666. healthy horse has the potential to perform to the best of his or her ability yet health was negatively aligned to welfare

Tables Don’t understand how MWS can be zero and Best life 7, but 3 are common to both.

I have changed common to both to standard procedures. I have removed the tables and they will go into supplementary materials.