

BSPS Members Questions and Society

Answers

Introduction:

The BSPS is always grateful to receive members' ideas and feedback. Many of the questions and issues that are raised are often conflicting with other members' opinions and views. We have however been able to make considerable changes over the last few years as a result of members' ideas and this can be found on our 'You Said We Did' page on the website.

As a result of these changes including the new London International Horse Show series and finals and the changes we have made to our championship shows the society has seen membership increased by 20% to record levels. Pony registrations and entries at our championship shows have significantly increased with circa 4000 entries at the Summer Championship show, circa 2000 at the Winter Championship show and circa 1500 at the Heritage Championship Show. The BSPS is grateful for the positive support we receive from HOYS, LIHS, RIHS and Burghley in listening to and where possible supporting the changes raised from our members.

The BSPS receives numerous questions from members directly through the Society, Area Chairmen, Council Members and following members Zoom meetings. These questions can be 'one off' relating to an actual issue for the member concerned, clarification of rules, suggestions for rule changes, changes to classification of classes, new classes or general comments.

This page will provide answers to most questions that are raised, except where they relate to an individual member or members. This will provide a reference point for members, so they do not need to ask questions that have already been answered.

A significant number of questions emanate from the members Zoom meetings held annually or from the specific Zoom meetings that have been held with, home produced members, working hunter members, professional producers and the future of the plaited pony members meeting. Following future meetings, questions raised and answers given will be added to this page.

Most of the answers to the questions raised can be found in the British Show Pony Rule and Handbook which is on the website and sent to members in hard copy when

they rejoin annually, this should be the first point of reference (this is updated annually).

Matters relating to BSPS areas and Area Shows are best directed to your Area Chairmen in the first instance whose details can be found on page 2 of the rule book.

The BSPS can only affect certain rule changes and new classes, following negotiations with RIHS, LIHS, HOYS and Burghley. Members must appreciate that requests for new classes may only normally be able to be facilitated with the loss of other classes as there is often limited space in timetables to add in new competitions.

This page should be read in conjunction with the 'You Said We Did' page on the website which outlines the changes the Society made following requests from members. A separate Judges page has also been developed for both judges and members.

1. Judges – Profiles, Conduct & Eligibility

1.1 Can judges profiles be put on the BSPS website?

It would not be possible to include a judge's profiles however, individual shows and events may ask a judge for a biography as part of the commentator's notes.

1.2 Should judges stand together and communicate when judging or be separate?

Most judges prefer to work in partnership with their co-judge particularly where there are no marks or ponies are being pulled in in order. There are certain classes where judges judge independently of each other e.g. WHP, LIHS, Mountain and Moorland final and certain classes at the BSPS Champs.

1.3 Should there be more restrictions on who judges can judge and the classes they can judge?

The rule book has specific criteria that sets out who judges can judge. It is the responsibility of competitors not to go under judges that conflict with the rule book, this is covered in Section W and Section X in the rule book. The Society does point out to judges that, even if the rules do not cover this point, we do not expect judges to judge best friends ie someone they would go on holiday with or social with on a regular basis. The BSPS only allows judges to judge one section in any RIHS and LIHS qualifying classes (except the supreme mountain and moorland final qualifying classes). The BSPS has no jurisdiction over other societies rules or who can judge for example HOYS qualifiers. Many BSPS judges are also on other judging panels where different rules apply.

Whilst the BSPS has a significant number of judges on their panel we are still looking to increase our judges panel to meet all the qualifiers we need to provide judges for especially as judges can only judge one qualifier in each section. For example, there are 25 LIHS for cradle and nursery stakes classes which will immediately utilise 50 judges from the panel. Judges should also not judge qualifying classes when they are judging the final.

1.4 Should there be restrictions on judges judging others who they are on a committee with or other judges?

The BSPS is built on a committee / area structure and is reliant on volunteers, to put restrictions in place would severely jeopardise those able to participate / join committees or societies. The BSPS does not have sufficient judges to prevent judges judging other judges, members also claim that the same (no-competing) judges judge too often.

2. Becoming & Remaining a Judge – Assessment, Conferences & Panel

2.1 How do future judges know the assessment process?

The BSPS publicises when a future judge's assessment will take place and members can apply to the office for an application form and assessment pack; this will be published on the Judge's page on the website.

2.2 How often do judges have to attend a judges' conference?

Judges are now required to attend a judges' conference once every three years in addition to a mid-season judges Zoom meeting where the society and judges can raise issues of concern or require clarity. Judges attend the conferences more frequently than they are required to do. The judges' conferences discuss a range of issues including judge's dilemmas, new classes, rule changes, judging performance, conformation, type, jumping etc this will include guest speakers. In addition to the rules contained in the rule book, the chairman of the judge's assessment committee writes to judges regularly on any specific issues the society would like to focus on during a season.

2.3 How are judges elected on to the judges panel?

Judges are elected annually and must complete an application form which includes the number of shows they have judged at the preceding year. If judges wish to apply for a 'star' they must meet the following criteria, have been on the judging panel for a minimum of 3 years, judged a minimum of 10 classes in the section they wish to apply for and provide an updated CV.

In completing their application form judges must sign that they fit and able to judge if necessary, with spectacles and hearing aid and be able to judge for long periods with adequate mobility. They must not have been subject to any convictions or disciplinary action regarding safeguarding of children or vulnerable adults or animal cruelty. There is no upper age limit when judges need to retire from the panel.

2.4 Should judges be reassessed annually?

The BSPS does not have sufficient resources to reassess judges annually however, if complaints are received regarding judges' performance which does not result in a referral to the judge's enquiry committee a stipendiary steward will be sent to monitor their next judging appointment and their performance will be addressed with them.

2.5 What is the process of the Judges Assessment?

Once you have communicated with the office to let them know you would like to go for assessment, you will attend on the designated assessment day.

The assessment day for WHP candidates takes place at the BSPS Winter Championships where we can guarantee full classes with different scenarios. There is still a rules assessment as well as a course walk, pointing out deliberate errors within the course.

For the flat assessment day, you will first be assessed by one of four assessors on the conformation and performance of four to five different ponies. This is applicable to flat plaited and heritage ponies, depending on which panel you are being assessed for.

Following this, you will be assessed on your knowledge of the rule book and the marking system by two separate individuals.

After all parts of the assessment are completed, you will be informed by the Chairmen of Judges whether you have been successful and any feedback they have for you. They will also advise you if you are required to complete any probationing appointments, which must be completed within the given timeframe. Failure to complete these probationing appointments will mean you will need to go for assessment again.

The probationing judging involves being alongside a senior judge, who will then submit a report about your knowledge and suitability to the Chairmen of Judges with their notes.

These reports are evaluated by the BSPS in September time, and it is then determined whether you are placed onto the panel for the following year.

It is a very thorough process, as we want only the highest level of knowledge represented on our panels.

3. Disciplinary Process & Complaints

3.1 What is the disciplinary process for judges?

If the society receives two independent letters relating to a judge's performance within 14-days of the show they will be referred to the Independent Judges Enquiry Committee.

The names of the complainants are redacted and the complaints sent to the judge for comment and their reports are submitted to the committee. The committee receives all reports that have the complainant and the judge's name redacted. When the committee has made their decision, the judge is informed and has 14-days to lodge an appeal to a second independent committee with a fee of £400, (fees are ten times judge's membership) this is refunded if the appeal is upheld.

The committee is chaired by Adrian Beaumont, Council member supported by Joy Hall, life member of council, they do not participate in the meeting if they are aware or have knowledge of the complaint. Their task is primarily to assist the committee regarding process and the rules of the society. The committee comprises of Mr A Aspin (former JP, Council member and proprietor of Endon riding school), Mr Edward Bunn, JP (Hickstead), Mr Marcus Cable Chief Executive of The Pony Club, Ms Nicola Cole (H-Power - LIHS), Dr Jayne Hastie (nee Nixon) M.A, Vet, M.B, BSc, MRCBS. Miss Emma Wardel, (Operations Director, Grandstand Media / HOYS).

The results of the judges enquiry committee are posted on the BSPS website.

If judges indicate they are not appealing the outcome the results will be published sooner. Members must appreciate that this is a lengthy process.

Competitors have 14 days after the show to lodge a complaint. The complaint is then sent to the judge with any reference to the complainant redacted. Judges are generally given 21 days to respond. All the complaints and responses are collated and any information relating to the show, class or date is redacted so that the complaint is anonymous. Papers are then sent to the judges enquiry committee and a date agreed when they are able to meet. Following the conclusion of the complaint the judges have a further 14 days to appeal the outcome. There is therefore an average 38 days before information can be sent to the judges enquiry committee. Depending on their availability the Committee is normally able to meet within 28 days depending on the time of year, there is then a further time to report outcomes to the judges, complainants and the council.

3.2 Should the society have a standard complaints form?

The society does not believe it is appropriate to have a standard complaints form and accept complaints from members which are either dealt with immediately or referred to the Council. There is a vast diversity in the complaints received which covers complaints for example about other members behaviour, social media, members eligibility to compete in classes,

how the affiliation is run etc. We believe allowing members to write in on any issue they wish to complain about works adequately.

4. Marks, Penalties & Systems

4.1 Should marks revert to 60/40 or add a mark for the rider?

Marks are predominantly used in HOYS qualifiers and are for HOYS to determine the ratio of marks. The BSPS believe that 50/50 is the right allocation of marks for Mountain and Moorland classes with conformation taking precedence to maintain the importance of breed standards/type and characteristics. There is no appetite to include a mark for the rider in flat classes in any of the major stakeholders as this is not an equitation class.

4.2 Can marks be reinstated for the RIHS?

The RIHS have no intention of reinstating marks for their classes.

4.3 Can judges make comments on mark sheets to help the competitor?

The BSPS would support judges who comment on marks sheets regarding performance for example 'mark deducted for go round' but it would be inappropriate to comment on riders ability or conformation of the pony as this could be upsetting for the rider and alert others to faults on a pony.

4.4 Should there be set penalties deducted for a wrong leg etc?

It is not appropriate to have set penalties as there are so many factors to take into account when judging, for example ponies behind the vertical, not off the leg, on the forehand, on two tracks, not tracking up etc. With regards to a wrong leg this can be one stride immediately corrected, a child cantering all the way round on the wrong leg, or a pony going disunited.

4.5 Is the society considering developing an automated system for marks rather than the paper-based approach, this should avoid errors?

The BSPS is working to develop a system and has piloted this at LIHS and the Heritage show with a paper system as back-up. This is to test out the reliability of this approach, and whether this could be rolled out more widely. It is still of course reliant on the correct mark being inputted into the system. This will need to be further developed where possible in conjunction with other key stakeholders and look at any training cost implications.

5. Ring Procedure, Safety & Welfare

5.1 Should competitors only be allowed into the ring to strip the pony after it has completed the show?

This is left to the judge or the requirement of the show, for example the RIHS require all grooms to enter the ring as a group after the ponies have been lined up and then leave the ring altogether when the last rider has mounted. It is not appropriate to have hard and fast rules as in very adverse weather conditions, e.g. very cold / wet weather it would not be appropriate to leave ponies and children to stand for periods of time without coats or rugs, this is a safeguarding and welfare issue. Nor is it appropriate in very hot weather in large classes for children to be left without being hydrated.

5.2 Why can't stewards strip ponies, tack them up and put the riders back on?

This is not appropriate from a safety or safeguarding perspective. Stewards would not be insured if they inappropriately tacked up a pony or there was an accident, nor would it be appropriate for a steward to 'leg up' a child who the child did not know.

5.3 Should riders be penalised if they do not do the set show?

Riders should be penalised if they do not do the show set by the judge, if the rider is unsure of the show they should ask the judge before commencing their performance. Only in very specific circumstances where shows are running late and under time constraints should a show be set.

5.4 Can Working Hunter Ponies wear heart-bars or pads when competing?

No, the BSPS will not be introducing a change to these rules, 'soundness' is an essential requirement in classes and cannot be masked in any way.

5.5 Why are there so many shows in quick succession when trying to qualify for HOYS?

The allocation for HOYS qualifiers is for Grandstand Media. The BSPS would expect members, as would Grandstand Media, to consider the welfare of the pony regarding the amount of shows they compete in, in quick succession taking into account travel time. The welfare policy produced by the Showing Council which can be found in the rule book should be adhered to.

5.6 Can more dope testing be undertaken particularly for the winning pony?

The BSPS undertakes more dope testing than any other society, this is a combination of dope testing winning ponies, targeted dope testing where concerns have been raised by judges and officials and also to act as a deterrent.

6. Rider & Qualification Rules

6.1 Should lead rein riders be able to qualify in other classes, particularly, in cradle and nursery stake classes?

The BSPS does not intend to put further restrictions on classification for riders at this time, although certain classes are restricted on what the rider has qualified for previously e.g. tiny tots.

6.2 Should qualification be based on the pony and rider combination and not just the pony?

The BSPS believe it is too restrictive to make qualifications restricted to just pony and rider combinations. This is because it would be too prohibitive, if people's circumstances change they may not be able to sell their pony, if the rider is injured the pony may not be able to compete in a final and a number of breeders and owners do not have a dedicated rider and therefore need to have their animal ridden by a rider who is available or by the producer.

6.3 There should be further restrictions on children competing in tiny tots classes.

Further restrictions have been put in place for the championship show and this will be kept under review. The BSPS expects parents to consider whether it is appropriate for children to compete in these classes if they are able to ride at a higher level despite their age.

6.4 Can there be classes that reward 'the best rider' particularly now the best rider competition has been discontinued?

We will be introducing a new criteria for the Robert Oliver/Showmans Award awards at next year's summer championship show that should go some way to addressing this issue.

6.5 Should all lead rein handlers be required to lead in the left hand?

There are currently only requirements for competitors to lead in the left hand when competing in LIHS and Burghley lead rein sports pony classes where the children are required to jump small fences. There is no intention to change the rules otherwise as this would require other societies to do so for consistency.

6.6 Can tiny tots classes be split for show ponies and M&M classes?

At this moment in time there is no intention to split these classes other than into 'odds and evens' if entries permit as the split between plaited and M&M ponies is not even.

7. Class Structure, Height Limits & Specific Series

7.1 Can LIHS Mountain and Moorland qualifiers revert back to separating the classes into six classes rather than four at direct and semi-final qualifiers?

The BSPS will not be reverting back to six classes as there were insufficient entries to make these viable. However, the number of semi-final qualifications for each class has moved from two to three qualifications. At the Heritage Championships and Royal Windsor Show six classes remain at these shows.

7.2 Pretty Polly / Home Produced, can a plaited lead rein and first ridden class be re-introduced to the RIHS to match the M&M lead rein and first ridden?

The plaited lead rein and first ridden class was discontinued as there were insufficient ponies/riders to compete in the qualifying classes and was replaced with the M&M lead rein and first ridden where there are more competitors. These classes will not be reinstated.

7.3 Why can't Pretty Polly status be on the pony not the rider?

Home produced classes have to be on the pony and the rider otherwise riders riding for professional producers could compete in these classes.

7.4 Can Pretty Polly Intermediate classes be re-introduced at the RIHS and can the Young Dragonara class be open to intermediates?

The Pretty Polly Intermediate class was discontinued as there were insufficient animals competing in the qualifying classes. The Young Dragonara classes is restricted to animals not exceeding 153cm and for riders who have not attained their 20th birthday on the 1st January in the current year. It was agreed not to increase the height of the animals and age of the riders in a restricted class as there would be too wide a gap between the oldest and youngest riders and smallest and largest animals and it was felt that 20 should be the upper age where riders needed to be restricted.

7.5 Can the 'Challenge' criteria be revisited?

The 'Challenge' criteria has been revised for 2026.

7.6 Can all 122cm height restrictions be changed to 123cm across the board?

Plaited first ridden and cradle stakes, show hunter pony and the new first pony of show hunter type have all been increased to 123cm. There is no consensus to increase the plaited lead rein classes to 123cm from key stakeholders or other societies as there is a view that this will affect 'type'.

8. WHP, Intermediate & Cradle/Nursery Stakes

8.1 Can the age of the 153cm WHP change to 25yrs or the Intermediate WHP to 30yrs or have no age restriction?

The age for the rider for the 153cm WHP has been changed to 25yrs for 2026. There is currently no consensus to change the age for the Intermediate WHP.

8.2 Can the intermediate WHP courses be increased in height to 1m 15cm and the 133cm WHP put up to 1m?

The Intermediate WHP are the poorest performing classes with many competitors unable to jump the existing courses and the 133cm WHP classes and saw a significant number of children on the floor at last year's RIHS final, therefore, increasing the height of these courses is not appropriate (please see the changes that have been made to the classification of course for next year's RIHS qualifying classes).

8.3 Plaited WHP pony numbers are dropping due to lack of consistency in the courses and adding additional height at finals is prohibitive, can this be addressed?

There is also too big a gap between the nursery stakes and the cradle stakes classes and can the age of the riders be increased for consistency with other classes?

This has been addressed for 2026 with 90% of the fence having to be at the set height and a graduated increase of heights between classes with only 5cm added for the final for RIHS (this does not apply to LIHS). The age of the riders for the cradle stakes has been increased to align it with a 123cm hunter pony and the 122cm WHP and the age of the nursery stakes riders has been aligned to LIHS.

8.4 Can a cradle stakes class be introduced to the RIHS?

This has been introduced for 2026.

8.5 Can Intermediate WHPs be open to animals of any height?

The Intermediate WHP classes will remain in accordance with the rule book. There are numerous classes for horses exceeding 160cm (hacks) and the hunter, riding horse and working hunter horses over 158cm to compete in horse classes.

8.6 Can more junior small and large WHP classes and ridden classes be introduced?

The BSPS are considering introducing more of these classes at the Heritage Championship Show for 2026.

8.7 Could the BSPS consider not allowing the 153cm WHP and the Intermediate WHP to be able to qualify the same pony on the same day.

Due to changes in 2026 whilst the same pony will be able to qualify in both classes as the RIHS finals are on different days, they will not be able to compete in both classes on the same day for 2026.

9. HOYS, RIHS, Gold Cup & Other Special Classes

9.1 Can the junior M&M ridden classes be split in the HOYS qualifiers?

This is a matter for HOYS.

9.2 Can a novice Gold Cup/Dessert Orchid be introduced at the summer championship show?

There is insufficient time to introduce new classes of this type. The Desert Orchid is a unique class to test the rider/horse combination, and it would be inappropriate to have a novice section. However, a M&M class was introduced for the Desert Orchid for 2025.

The Gold Cup is being changed for 2026 to include a non-qualifiers nursery stakes class for younger riders as the Intermediates can now qualify for Burghley.

9.3 Can the BSPS produce the 'Characteristics and Type' attributed to each class they are competing in?

This is already in place for the M&M class and can be found on the website. The BSPS will consider whether to widen this to all other classes.

10. Governance, Council & Area Structure

10.1 Where can we find the agenda and minutes for Chairman of Area Chairmen meetings?

The agenda is sent out to the area chairmen ahead of the meeting and minutes following the meeting. It is expected that the area chairmen consult with their committee and members for agenda items and share with their members the minutes after the meeting. If an area chairman is unable to attend the meeting they can send a representative in their place.

10.2 How do you become a member of the BSPS Council?

BSPS Council elections are held annually, they will not be held if there are insufficient nominations to fill the places available. The nomination form can be found on the last page of the BSPS rule and show handbook.

Council members are elected on a 3-year cycle and there is no restriction to the amount of time a member can remain on the council if re-elected by the membership.

To be nominated for the Council, who are Company Directors you must be:

- An adult member of the Society (not a junior member)
- Not be a member of the Scottish branch (they are a separate entity)
- Not be barred from being a Company Director
- Been a member of the Society for at least 5-years
- Nominated and seconded by members of the Society who are not junior members, members wishing to stand for Council must sign to confirm they are willing to stand for election to the Council. All those seeking election or re-election must complete up to 200 words as to why they wish to be elected to the Council.

The Council elects the Officers of the Society annually e.g. Chairman, Vice Chairman, Treasurer and Executive Members of the Council.

Please note this is an entirely voluntary position and is not remunerated.

Council members may claim up to 30 pence per mile for attending a meeting. This is a very demanding role that requires members to attend all Council meetings and their nominated sub-committees as well as giving a commitment to help and support at the majority of shows and events including the 3 championship shows, future judges assessment, judges conference AGM and Ball, Burghley, LIHS and RIHS in addition to make themselves available to take members calls and enquiries.

11. Championship Shows – Judges, Costs & Organisation

11.1 Who selects judges for the BSPS Championship Shows?

Judges for the Championship Shows are selected by the Executive Officer and the Head office team with input from the Show Chairman for each show (if they do not compete). RIHS select judges for that show.

11.2 Do the BSPS consider the cost of entry fees for championship shows to be too high?

The BSPS is conscious of the cost of attending the championship shows. The society's income for shows are entry fees and sponsorship. Whilst the entry fees can appear to be high and prize money is linked to entries forward the entry fee has to help cover all other costs such as venue hire, WHP courses, security, vet, stewards and officials, first-aid and medical care etc etc.

Our Stewards work tirelessly with long days in all weather conditions and it is important they are looked after. As an example, the cost to the society of a Steward with hotel accommodation including, being provided with 3 meals a day and some minor travel expenses this is approximately £150 per person per day. As an example, the cost of the WHP courses at the summer championship show with hire course builders and assistants is approximately £10,000. Entry fees need to reflect the costs of putting on such large events.

The society also needs to retain significant reserves to cope with unforeseen eventualities where shows may need to be cancelled.