

## **New Era for Pony Club in Australia**

*‘ . . Riders will now learn more about why horses behave as they do . . ’*

Pony Club in Australia is about to undergo one of the biggest changes in its 80 year history, with the introduction of a new syllabus which includes equine welfare and equitation science.

“We are proud to be at the forefront of such a big change,” Pony Club Australia CEO Dr Catherine Ainsworth said this week. “With more focus on both horse welfare and rider safety, we are global leaders in the sport.”

Pony Club members will continue to work their way up through seven levels of certificates via the new syllabus, which build on their riding, horsemastership (horse care) and horse knowledge skills. The new syllabus combines 80 years of sound knowledge and training, with new scientific knowledge about rider safety, horse behaviour and welfare.

For example, riders will now learn more about why horses behave as they do - their flight instinct, the ability to learn through pressure and release, and the need for consistent instructions by the rider.

One of its best known proponents is Dr Andrew McLean, CEO of Equitation Science International and Behaviour Consultant to Melbourne University Veterinary Hospital. He is also on the Board of Pony Club Australia, giving us a head start in the industry.

“The new syllabus is based on the field of ‘Equitation Science’ which includes learning processes, animal behaviour and biomechanics intertwined with traditional riding technique,” Dr McLean said. “This helps us to better understand the horse and make him safer for riders, improve his welfare and give children tools to improve equestrian performance. It is currently one of the fastest growing sciences and is being taught to vet and animal science students in dozens of universities across Australia, Europe, Canada, the UK and the US.”

The new certificate manuals have been written by one of Dr McLean’s colleagues, Dr Portland Jones. Dr Jones, who is a horse trainer, lecturer, author and coach with over 25 years’ experience, said this week:

“As coaches we try to not only nurture a love for the horse but also to educate riders so that they can ride in a safe, balanced and effective way. We help our students to develop correct habits and horsemanship skills that are consistent with the community’s expectations of animal welfare and that will endure, regardless of where their riding journey takes them.”

“This is a very exciting time,” Dr McLean added. “The world is changing rapidly and we are learning more about the horse every year. Pony Club teaching must reflect these changes – we must be ethical custodians of the horse so that future generations of students can enjoy the horse as we have done.”

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The Australian Government through Sport Australia recognises Pony Club Australia to develop Pony Club in Australia. The financial support of Sport Australia is gratefully acknowledged.

**More on Equitation Science:**

Equitation Science embraces all forms of training that are evidence-based and ethical. It has a strong focus on:

- Ethology (the study of the horse's natural behaviours) and
- Learning theory (the study of how animals and people learn)
- It also incorporates biomechanics (the science of how the horse moves) and recognises the limits of the horse's cognitive (thinking) and physical abilities.

**Interviews/photos:**

Dr McLean, Dr Ainsworth and Dr Jones are available for phone interview. Please just let me know if you wish this organised. I have attached a couple of photos you can use. Thank you for your support.

**Accompanying photos: (Just thumbnails here)**

- \* The new look Certificate manuals for Pony Club members.
- \* Rider and horse: *Riders will now learn more about why horses behave as they do.*
- \* *Riders learn horses prefer stroking or scratching rather than loud heavy pats as a reward – it replicates the way they nibble each others' withers in the paddock.*



**More information:**

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