

Are there potential opportunities for industry, colleges providing equine science courses and primary research departments to work even more closely together?

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In an ideal world all the products, techniques, equipment etc. that we employ in relation to the horses under our care would have undergone adequate and appropriate testing to ensure that they are safe and have a high probability of fulfilling the claims made for them. Unfortunately, with respect to many of the non-pharmaceutical registered products, few have any proven science, especially not in the horse to back their claims. According to the OED: '*Prove = verb (past part. **proved** or **proven** ..) : demonstrate by evidence or argument the truth or existence of...*' In a scientific context I am taking *proven* to mean that studies showing efficacy have been published in at least one peer reviewed journal – either as a result of a primary 'research study' or as part of clinical evidence. It is important to note that such a level of proof is not always required. However, there are many reasons why such science is not carried out, but perhaps two of the most relevant to this paper are *cost* and *expertise*. An appropriate equine study which has been carried out with sufficient numbers of horses for the appropriate length of time will be expensive and time consuming. The profit margins within the equine field do not tend to be large and therefore there is often little money available for such work. Publication in highly respected journals requires a good study design, use of appropriate statistical methods, an ability to write scientific papers and a good knowledge of the subject area. The potential purchaser ideally should have sufficient knowledge to be able to distinguish between a study that actually shows some efficacy from one which just appears to. We therefore have :-

- An 'Industry' which either wants or should want to undertake, when appropriate, good quality research to provide support for certain products – but they cannot afford expensive projects. When there is no 'pull' from the end-users or regulatory pressure, then it is difficult to justify the cost of strongly scientifically based product support. Certain projects would be generic in their appeal and therefore are even more difficult to justify in today's market.
- Colleges/Universities providing equine degree programmes, as part of their course, usually require undergraduates to undertake small research projects. Colleges often have access to relatively large numbers of horses housed locally. Increasingly, such institutes are employing lecturers with research expertise. However, the supervisors cannot be experts in all topics/areas, there is often little free internal money to support any projects and often teaching commitments are large. The students are obviously not experienced in research techniques, the time they have to undertake their projects is often relatively short, and some are just not interested. The research commonly needs to be non-invasive in nature etc.
- Researchers working within departments/institutes, where one of their main objectives is to undertake and publish good quality research, are often limited by horse/people costs and availability although they may be experts in one or more areas. They may want to undertake industry focussed research but either cannot obtain sufficient funds, do not have the contacts or may be discouraged by the unsubstantiated concern voiced by some that 'industry linked research = biased research of an inferior quality.!

There are already good examples where the various groups are working well together e.g. WALTHAM's collaborative projects and the secondment of degree project students for specific projects with researchers expert in their topic area; BUT are there opportunities to develop even more effective working collaborations?

- Could we perhaps harness the student power from the colleges to obtain valuable information on a UK wide basis? Are there projects that would benefit from information being collected from several regions within the UK? Could this be centrally co-ordinated?
- Could colleges work more closely with 'industry' and 'researchers' to develop programmes, that help to answer key questions, which are additive and develop over a series of years – with data being collected via a series of small projects rather than one large one?
- Could 'researchers' help to 'mentor' college project supervisors where appropriate?
- How can we best educate the 'end-user' /purchaser re the value of good science?

Is this valuable, desirable, and achievable? What are the barriers to success and is the potential prize worth it?