



EQUINE FITTERS
COUNCIL

The independent directory for equine fitters

www.equinefittersdirectory.org

EQUINE FITTING – THE CASE FOR VOLUNTARY REGULATION

The Equine Fitters Council & Equine Fitters Directory

VISION

The independent authority for equine fitters –
setting standards; promoting education;
encouraging professional practice within the industry



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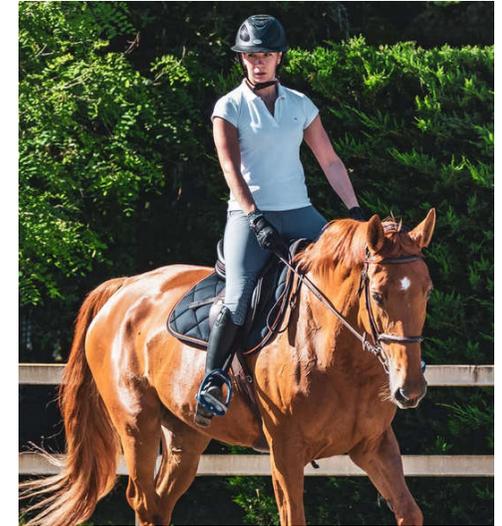
Looking ahead

There is an enduring connection between people and horses. We enjoy their companionship, and the power and speed they represent. But whilst equestrian activities offer mental and physical benefits for humans, the same, sadly, cannot be said for every horse. Too often, unsympathetic or uninformed use of the saddle, bit, bridle, or harness contribute to poor welfare outcomes.

Great strides have been made in the past twenty to thirty years by diligent fitters, researchers, teachers, and manufacturers to enhance the comfort of the horse. This work has helped maintain the social license for equine sports and leisure activities.

However, training and practice in saddlery and livery fitting remain fragmented and poorly understood. Service providers operating in the same field may be trained or untrained, registered or unregistered, insured or uninsured.

This creates confusion, and it means that the industry falls short of the expectation that all those who work with equines should be professionally competent and subject to regulation.



“those who work with equines should be professionally competent and subject to regulation.”

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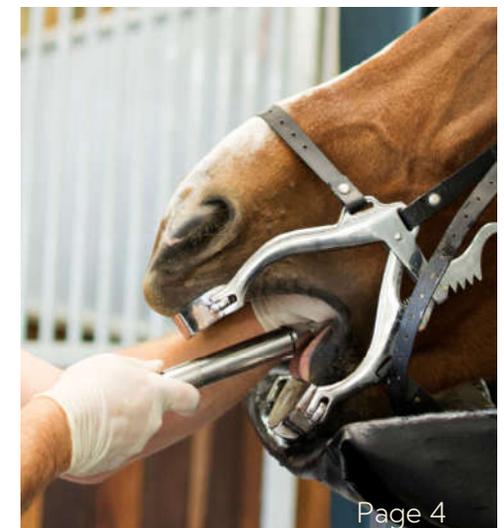
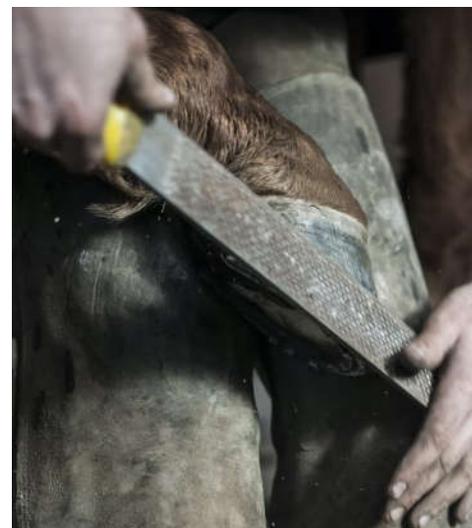
The Case for Regulation

There is currently no statutory requirement that a person fitting a saddle, bit, bridle, or harness meets standards of training, conduct, or professional development. There has been no governing body to set minimum standards for training and education, to determine eligibility criteria, and control the admission and removal of practitioners. Anyone may call themselves a 'Fitter'; without any training, prior knowledge or experience, and without holding insurance.

For professional individuals and organisations invested in education and rigorous process, there are concerns about the impact of less skilled and less attentive fitters on the reputation of the industry, and the welfare of the horse.

Regulation, whether statutory or voluntary, serves to counter market failure, elevates standards of practice, drives advances in training, and ultimately confers professional status.

Voluntary regulation of equine fitters, properly communicated and implemented, will contribute to public confidence and improved horse welfare, quantify and qualify good training and good practice, mitigate undesirable externalities, and sustain the social license to operate. *Note¹*



Laying the Foundations

The Saddle Fitting Training & Qualifications Steering Group

The Saddlers Company is empowered by Royal Charter to act in any matter related to saddlery and saddlery fitting. This privilege, and duty, has guided its discussions with the equine industry about regulation, and all subsequent activity.

In May 2016, the Company accepted an invitation to evaluate the training, vocational and qualification needs of those who practice as or aspire to become saddle fitters; and lead a response to those needs. A duly convened Steering Group had its inaugural meeting in September 2016.

Over the next two years the Steering Group (and subsidiary working groups) met regularly, and progress was made on several fronts including on a set of Occupational Standards and a Code of Conduct and Professional Practice.

Although the Steering Group recognised a need for industry based self-regulation to address welfare and consumer concerns, agreement could not be reached on the optimal means of securing voluntary regulation. Discussions reached an impasse in 2019, and the process was paused while bi-lateral talks continued to try and unblock the process.

The Society of Equine Bit and Bridle Fitters Working Group

The Worshipful Company of Loriners is likewise empowered to act in the interest of lorinery and lorinery fitting.

In 2016 the Loriners, with industry partners, drew up plans for an independent governing body that would set standards of practice, provide a code of conduct, create a register of qualification providers and establish a directory of members to which the public would have access.

By 2017 the Working Group had drafted a constitution and organisational structure. However, it became increasingly clear that the correct selection and fit of lorinery and saddlery was necessary to protect horse welfare, and rider safety.

In 2020 talks began between the Loriners and the Saddlers to form a regulatory body that oversaw all equine fitting.

The Fitting Industry Today

Training & Qualifications

Qualifications, where they exist in the UK, are accredited client products, and outside the formal schedule of qualifications approved by Ofqual (the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation) which regulates qualifications, examinations, and assessments in England. Training ranges from product awareness days, to short introductory courses, to pathways culminating in assessment and certification.

The number of sales agents and brand representatives selling directly to users is increasing. Whilst some brands mandate in-depth training and the delivery of excellent customer service, others incentivise sales over quality of fitting or after-care.

It is challenging therefore to differentiate between one fitter claiming to be suitably qualified and/or experienced and another. For the average rider it is particularly so.

Membership Bodies

The Society of Master Saddlers and the British Equestrian Trade Association are the largest membership bodies representing fitting, trade, craft, and retail members.

They are joined in the sector by a growing number of small specialist associations. There are also a significant but unknown number of fitters who are not aligned to any membership body. These fitters, who may match or surpass other "registered" fitters in terms of experience and skill, are nonetheless unregistered and therefore unregulated.

The Equine Fitters Council

The Worshipful Company of Saddlers and the Worshipful Company of Loriners are the members (shareholders) of a Company limited by guarantee. These parties reserve the right to appoint the Company Directors, collectively known as the Equine Fitters Council.

The Council is independent and operates on a not-for-profit basis. Its principal function is the administration and operation of the Directory of Equine Fitters through the office of a Registrar.

The Council formulates policy and directs the administrative structure for the Directory, including approving the eligibility requirements, procedures for listing and de-listing, setting fees for registration and generally exercising all the powers necessary to establish and operate the Directory and the linked website.

In final dispute resolution, fitters found to have failed in their duty to their client, the horse, or their colleagues, will be removed from the Directory.

“The objects for which the Company is established are to secure the voluntary regulation of equine fitters through the creation and maintenance of a Directory of equine fitters and training providers (the Directory), determine the criteria for listing in the Directory and lay down the regulations to be applied to those so listed in order to advance and provide for the welfare of horses and with that aim to support those working with horses.”

EFC Constitution, 29th September 2022ⁱⁱ

EQUINE FITTERS COUNCIL VALUES

Impartial & transparent

Inclusive & accessible

Serious about equine welfare

Strong leadership

Encouraging excellence

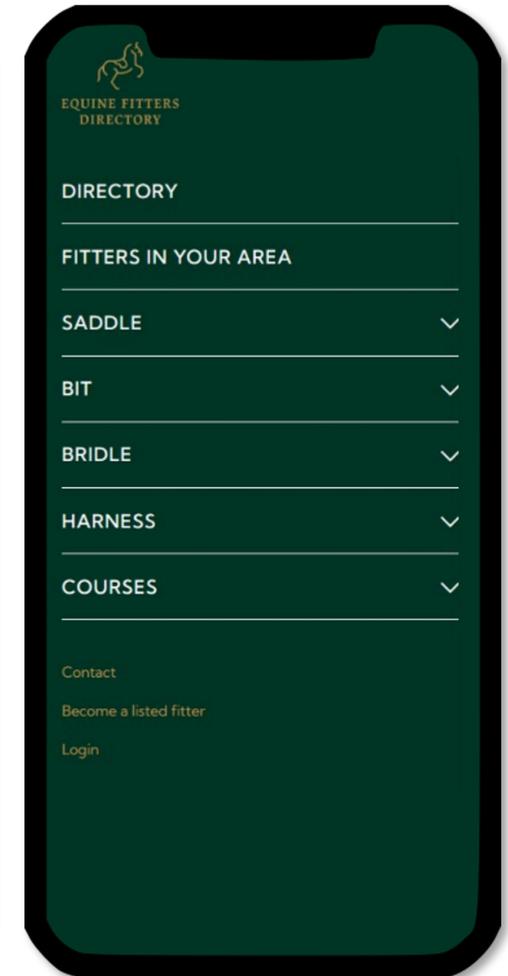
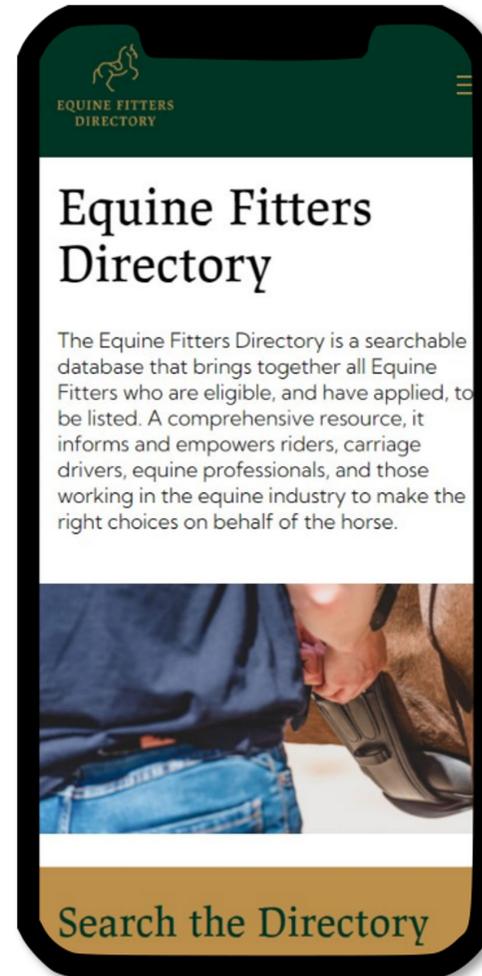
The Equine Fitters Directory

The Directory will be an online searchable database of fitters who seek listing and meet eligibility criteria set by the Council and administered by the Registrar to the Council.

By broadening the remit to encompass the fitting of saddles, bits, bridles, and harness, the Directory will function as a comprehensive resource for equine professionals, businesses, riders, and horse owners. Information will be presented in a standardised format, whether a fitter profile or course curriculum, so that, for the first time, users of a fitter's services can make an informed choice.

This approach will encourage the use of professional fitters and drive out bad practice. Applications for listing may be made by anyone working as an Equine Fitter and will be subject to a rigorous validation process. Listed fitters may therefore be trusted to hold stated credentials and to meet insurance, Code of Conduct, and ongoing training (including continued professional development) requirements.

The Directory will also signpost training providers where the provision of training meets set criteria and where those organisations agree to abide by a code of practice.



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Next Steps

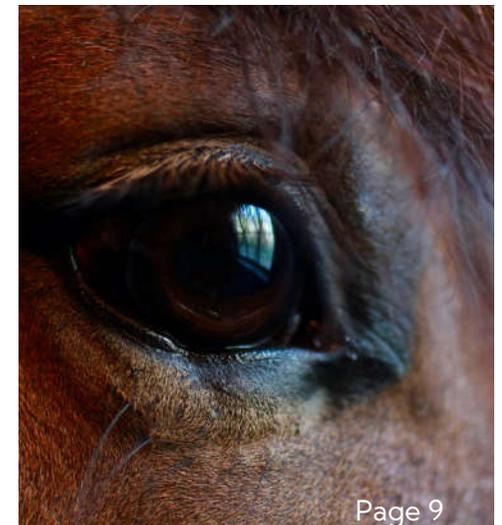
To deliver self-regulation, a body of work lies ahead:

- Assemble a full Council
- Review of training courses with a view to benchmarking
- Support and commission complementary research
- Continue to work with fitters' membership organisations to raise standards of practice and customer satisfaction.
- Ongoing development and refinement of listing criteria and scope of the Directory

Importantly, this undertaking, which aims to bring about significant positive change, will benefit all stakeholders. We seek a collaborative effort to raise standards and achieve cohesion across the industry. We commend this initiative to you in the interests of the horse.

Thank you

Contact the EFC Working Group:
office@equinefitterscouncil.org



Questions & Answers

- **What is an Equine fitter?**

An Equine Fitter is a person who fits items of equine saddlery and lornery. These include saddles, bridles, bits, and harness.

- **Is listing in the Directory voluntary?**

Yes, all listings are voluntary.

- **Who can apply for listing?**

Anyone who works as an Equine Fitter and can prove that they meet the eligibility criteria.

- **What are the eligibility criteria?**

All applications will be validated against eligibility criteria, including: proof of identity and insurances; proof of certification and membership of professional bodies where relevant; a commitment to continued learning, and to the EFC Code of Conduct.

- **What will listing cost?**

A fair and flat fee will be applied to all listing applications and renewals: The 2023-2024 listing fee for individual equine fitters is discounted from £95 to £47.50.

- **Can the Council prevent someone from working as a fitter?**

No. The Council does not want, nor does it intend, to prevent anyone from working. Those working as fitters are encouraged to apply for listing because we believe that unified effort is necessary to lift standards of training and fitting.

Appendices

The Equine Fitters Council Constitutionⁱⁱ

https://bit.ly/EFC-Constitution_Sept22

Notes

i 'Regulated profession' is a term which is defined in the Professional Qualifications Bill. It means a profession which is regulated by law in the UK or a part of the UK. 'Profession' includes an occupation or trade, or any subdivision and specialism within a profession. The Bill sets out that a profession is regulated by law where there is a legal requirement to have certain qualifications or experience (or meet an alternative condition or requirement) in order to undertake certain professional activities or use a protected title.

The definition is set out in Clause 16 of the Professional Qualifications Bill, which may be revised before this Bill becomes an Act.

Equine fitting is not a regulated profession, and any regulation must therefore be voluntary

Regulation (whether state mandated or voluntary) in the private market represents an attempt to influence practices and produce outcomes which might otherwise not occur. Frequently the main objectives are consumer protection, professional conduct, to change preferences or behaviours and to mitigate undesirable externalities. Regulation must be accompanied by the ability to enforce decisions.

An externality is a cost or benefit caused by a producer that is not financially incurred or received by that producer. An externality can be both positive or negative and can stem from either the production or consumption of a good or service. The costs and benefits can be both private—to an individual or an organization—or social, meaning it can affect society as a whole.

ii EFC Objects, and references to EFC Articles updated on 8th December 2022 to reflect Equine Fitters Council incorporation on 29th September 2022.



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