
GOVERNING BRITISH RACING

A proposed framework for structural reform

From Goodwood and York Racecourses

June 2026

THE CASE FOR ACTING NOW

British racing has reached an inflection point. The resignation of the BHA Chairman in February 2026 and Ascot's departure from the RCA in May are symptoms of a deeper structural failure. A sport generating over £4 billion annually for the UK economy cannot agree how to govern itself. Previous attempts at reform — from the 2003 Racing Review to Premier Racing — have repeatedly stalled because they tried to achieve change through the very structures that make change impossible.

If meaningful reform is to happen, it will require leadership from the racecourses that stage the sport's flagship racing. This paper sets out what that reform should look like.

At its heart, this paper argues for three changes:

1. The RCA returns to being a true trade body — representing racecourses on standards, services and lobbying, and out of fixtures and funding.
2. A strong, independent BHA Board — with the racecourse block vote removed, so decisions reflect contribution rather than headcount.
3. A clear, written mandate for the incoming BHA Chair — broadly supported across the industry — to take up on appointment.

WHERE DECISIONS CURRENTLY FAIL

The BHA's Commercial Committee is where the debate between Horsemen and Racecourses is meant to happen, producing recommendations to the BHA Board. That process is failing for two reasons. First, self-interest: participants negotiate for their organisations rather than for the sport. Second, the committee's brief is too wide: its members are involved in decision-making for elements of the industry about which they have no direct experience. An all-weather operator helps determine elite Flat strategy; an elite Flat executive shapes the volume programme. Every decision becomes a compromise across products that share little beyond the horse.

THE PROPOSED STRUCTURE

The framework rests on a single insight: most of the conflict in British racing exists because one committee is trying to serve fundamentally different products. Separate the products, and most of the conflict disappears by default. The framework has three components.

- 1. Three specialist panels responsible for framing and proposing strategies for Elite Flat, Foundation Flat and Jump racing reporting to the BHA Board**

The Commercial Committee and other associated committees should be disbanded and replaced with three specialist panels: Elite Flat, Foundation Flat and Jump. This new structure replaces all other commercial committees and groups, whose work folds into the relevant division. Each panel comprises representatives from the racecourses and horsemen active in that element of the sport, together with three BHA-nominated experts in the relevant fields, drawn from areas such as broadcast, media, betting and the wider audience. They are supported by a BHA secretariat of senior staff — including race planning and fixture programming — who set the agenda and facilitate the panel’s work but do not vote.

For Elite Flat, the proposed composition is three racecourse representatives, three horsemen, and three BHA-nominated experts. Foundation Flat and Jump follow the same balanced model. One of the three BHA experts chairs the panel and votes only to break a tie; the other two carry standing votes alongside the racecourse and horsemen representatives. The BHA therefore holds two standing votes rather than a deciding block of three, with the chair deciding only genuine deadlocks.

Critically, racecourse representation on these panels is not through the RCA. The RCA plays no part in them. Racecourse representatives are decided by the racecourses delivering the sport at each level — those with direct experience of the product under discussion. There would be a nomination process, clear terms of reference and set terms in line with modern corporate governance procedures – any conflicts would be registered and managed appropriately – the representatives are there for the long-term good of the racing code. The panels are responsible for defining and proposing strategy for their code to the BHA Board, which will be the ultimate decision-maker and coordinator of balance between the three strands.

Tiers attach to races and fixtures, not to racecourses. A course like Goodwood or York would stage Elite racing on some days and Foundation racing on others. No racecourse is being sorted into a division — the race programme is.

We use ‘Foundation’ deliberately. This tier is the base on which the whole pyramid stands: the commercial engine of the betting product; vital to recruiting, engaging and retaining fans in their communities; a source of the diversity and character that make British racing distinctive on the global stage; and the proving ground that produces the Elite horses of the future. Within it, turf and all-weather racing have distinct characteristics and their strategies may diverge; race planning data will tell us whether a separate all-weather division is justified in time, and the structure allows a fourth panel to be established without disturbance if it is. On a similar basis within Jump racing there will be strands for summer jumping in addition to the October to April jumps programme.

PANEL	COVERS	COMPOSITION
Elite Flat	All races for the highest-rated horses, wherever staged, plus the development programme that produces them	3 × racecourse · 3 × horsemen · 3 × BHA appointed racing expert (eg media, broadcast, betting, punters, BHA exec in support; chair of the three holds a casting vote only)
Foundation Flat	Turf and all-weather programme — the commercial engine of the fixture list	Racecourse and horsemen representatives from that level incl turf and AWT, with specialist BHA support
Jump	National Hunt as a distinct code	Racecourse and horsemen representatives from that level, with specialist BHA support

Each panel debates and recommends on the matters within its division: fixtures, race planning, funding recommendations and product development. Debate happens among those who know the product — which is the entire point.

2. Defining the Elite Flat brief

The Elite tier is defined by the horses, not the venues. Any horse rated above a defined threshold — say 90, for the purposes of this paper — falls within the Elite Flat brief. All races for horses rated at or above that level, no matter which course, meeting or raceday stages them, are considered and agreed by the Elite Flat Panel.

The panel's remit extends to the pathway as well as the pinnacle – for example high-value maidens and novice races, conditions races and any strategy strand of future race programme aimed at supporting the production line of elite-level horses: it ensures the development races that produce these horses are run in the right sequence, on the right track configuration, with the right geographical mix and frequency. No course stages races aimed at Elite Flat horses without the permission of the BHA's Elite Flat racing team, acting under the panel's direction.

An Elite Flat panel constituted this way can focus on the shop window of the sport — ensuring the programme for the very best horses enables them to compete internationally as well as domestically, and that British racing's flagship product is planned as a single coherent calendar rather than a collection of competing fixtures.

Similar principles as above apply to the Foundation Flat and Jump panels.

3. An independent BHA Board as arbiter

Most divisional matters are not mutually exclusive. Where they are — funding recommendations, some fixture decisions, proportion of make up of codes and cross-over areas such as minimum values — the BHA Board acts as the independent arbiter as the governing body of the sport, with a clear brief: to make decisions it believes are in the best long-term interests of the sport.

For the Board to perform that role credibly, it must be genuinely independent. Two changes are required, and the first can be made immediately by convention:

- Member Nominated Directors become practitioners rather than representatives. The RCA and the Horsemen's Group each nominate one individual who sits on the Board as an individual subject expert, not as a delegate bringing an official view.
- The remaining directors are independent of positions on industry bodies, but are expected to know the industry as well as having a balanced and appropriate skills match. They may typically have been involved in ownership, sat on a racecourse board, served as an executive within the sport, or held a licence but any actual or perceived conflicts are registered and managed in line with best corporate governance practice. Their brief is to act as independent industry experts and take decisions in the sport's best long-term interests.

It is worth being explicit about what the Board does here, because it is the part people find hardest to picture. The current Board rarely arbitrates decisively — but that is a function of its composition, not its remit: a board of conflicted representatives tends towards the lowest common denominator. Remove the conflicts, give it genuine independence and a clear written mandate, and it can do the job it was built for. The panels debate and recommend within their divisions; the Board arbitrates between them on fixtures, race volume, funding split and marketing, in the long-term interest of the sport. This is deliberately not a reconstituted Commercial Committee — not a standing negotiation between interested parties, but an independent arbiter taking the decisions those parties cannot take for themselves.

The next BHA Chair appointment is the most consequential near-term decision in British racing. The mandate for reform must be agreed in writing before appointment — not assumed. A Vice Chair — likely 'of the sport' if an external Chair is selected — should be established to provide operational continuity and industry outreach through the reform period.

4. The RCA returns to being a trade body

In this structure the RCA maintains its proper and valuable role as a first-class trade body — and steps out of commercial decision-making entirely. It will not be involved in fixture and funding decisions, and so will not need a board position on any matter that could be deemed commercial. Its focus returns to the things a trade body should do well:

- Technical standards, sharing and promoting of best practice, and services to racecourses
- Lobbying of central Government on matters affecting venues eg Martyn's Law etc – BHA to retain primacy on gambling and equine welfare.

- Advising and coordinating in major crisis moments — equine flu, Covid and the like
- Negotiating with the BHA and other stakeholders on changes to the BHA General Instructions and on industry-wide decisions: weighing rooms, veterinary cover, the sport’s medical approach etc

The RCA Board’s duty in this model is to protect the interests of all racecourses in industry decisions, government policy and the funding and research questions that affect the whole sport — not to referee commercial competition between its own members. That conflict is removed from the RCA altogether.

The racecourses hold half of the BHA’s membership — three of its six shares — yet that holding is currently exercised as a single Racecourse Association position, decided internally on a one-member-one-vote basis. The result is a block vote: a course staging a significant share of the sport’s elite racing and prize money can be outvoted on headcount and then bound to a collective position it does not support. This paper proposes that the racecourse shareholding is exercised by the racecourses themselves — weighted by contribution rather than headcount, and capped so that no single ownership group can dominate however many courses it owns. Contribution might be measured by prize money, attendance, quality of racing, betting turnover or a sensible combination, to be determined — but on any such measure, a flat one-vote-per-course basis does not reflect what a course brings to the sport. The weighting should take in every licensed racecourse, whether an RCA member or not. Nor need the three racecourse shares always move together: ending the block vote lets a course align with the horsemen shareholders where interests genuinely coincide, rather than being locked to a single racecourse line.

These two reforms are complementary, not alternatives. The framework sets how commercial decisions are made; the shareholding reform ensures the settlement cannot be unpicked by any single member. As things stand, one member holding half of the BHA’s shares retains the power to move against the Board — so a framework built on the current shareholding rests on foundations another party can remove at will. Reforming the shareholding without reforming how decisions are made would change who holds the votes but not the quality of the decisions. Each depends on the other.

WHAT THIS FRAMEWORK RESOLVES

CURRENT FAILURE	HOW THE STRUCTURE ADDRESSES IT
Commercial Committee hampered by self-interest and an over-wide brief	Three specialist panels: debate and strategy formulation happens among those with direct experience of each product
People deciding for parts of the sport they do not know	Panel membership drawn from the racecourses and horsemen active at each level
Proliferation of committees and groups with overlapping briefs	All commercial committees and groups — replaced by the three panel divisions
BHA MNDs face irreconcilable fiduciary conflicts	Practitioner model: RCA and HG nominate individual experts, not representatives
RCA conflicted between trade body role and commercial refereeing	RCA exits fixtures and funding entirely; returns to member services, technical, venue lobbying and crisis roles
Cross-divisional disputes with no honest broker	Independent BHA Board governing body of the sport and arbitrates with an explicit long-term-interests brief
Elite programme planned as a collection of competing fixtures	Elite Flat Panel plans the flagship calendar as a single coherent product, domestic and international

One consequence worth stating plainly: the divisional structure dissolves most of the voting-rights argument that has paralysed the sport. When panel membership reflects who actually delivers each product, the question of how votes are weighted across an undifferentiated membership loses most of its heat. Weighted voting remains necessary for the genuinely cross-cutting questions — but the territory it must cover shrinks dramatically.

WHAT WE ARE ASKING

This paper is intended as a high-level proposal, not a detailed proposition. Industry discussion will be required to develop panel composition, Elite racing thresholds, Board voting mechanisms and nomination procedures — but we are requesting agreement around three key areas:

- That the outline structure described here — three specialist panels in place of the Commercial Committee as the single point of strategy and suggested policy, an independent BHA Board as arbiter, and the RCA restored to a trade body — is the right direction for British racing's governance.
- That the industry (BHA) curates a conversation around how we adopt agreed changes to the governance structure in a timely fashion
- That discussions begin immediately on the specific terms: panel composition, the Elite Flat definition, the practitioner MND conventions, and the non-negotiable conditions for the next BHA Chair appointment.

The RCA constitutional review reports to its board in July. That is the immediate deadline. The window for the sport to reform itself from within, rather than fracture into competing structures, is open now. It will not remain open indefinitely.

PROPOSED STRUCTURE — BHA

Specialist panels, an independent board, and the RCA as trade body

June 2026

BHA BOARD — INDEPENDENT ARBITER

Independent chair · Vice chair (of the sport) · Independent NEDs — industry-experienced, with no serving positions on industry bodies
2 practitioner MNDs — nominated by the RCA and the Horsemen's Group, sitting as individual subject experts, not representatives
Arbitrates where divisional recommendations conflict — funding, cross-over fixtures, minimum values — deciding in the best long-term interests of the sport

Panels debate and recommend · Board arbitrates and decides

ELITE FLAT PANEL

- 3 × racecourse — courses staging Elite racing
- 3 × horsemen
- 3 × BHA-nominated experts — chair holds casting vote only
- Non-voting BHA secretariat — race planning & senior staff

FOUNDATION FLAT PANEL

- Racecourse representatives — chosen by the courses staging that level
- Horsemen representatives
- 3 × BHA-nominated experts — chair holds a casting vote only
- Non-voting BHA secretariat — race planning & senior staff

JUMP PANEL

- Racecourse representatives — chosen by the courses staging that level
- Horsemen representatives
- 3 × BHA-nominated experts — chair holds a casting vote only
- Non-voting BHA secretariat — race planning & senior staff

These panels replace the Commercial Committee and all other commercial groups

Tiers attach to races and fixtures, not racecourses — the same course may stage Elite and Foundation racing

SHAREHOLDER & TRADE BODIES — OUTSIDE COMMERCIAL DECISION-MAKING

RCA — TRADE BODY

- Technical standards, best practice, services to racecourses
- Lobbying central Government on venue matters
- Crisis coordination — equine flu, Covid and the like
- Negotiates BHA General Instructions & industry-wide decisions with the BHA
- Nominates 1 practitioner MND to the BHA Board

No role in fixtures & funding — nominee sits as an individual expert

HORSEMEN'S GROUP

- Trade body for owners, trainers, jockeys, breeders
- Horsemen representation on the three panels, drawn from those active at each level
- Industry-wide negotiation alongside the RCA
- Nominates 1 practitioner MND to the BHA Board

Nominee sits as an individual expert — not a representative

HOW DECISIONS FLOW

- Divisional matters — fixtures, race planning, funding recommendations, product development — debated and recommended by the relevant panel
- Conflicting or cross-over matters — funding allocations, shared fixture slots, minimum values — decided by the independent BHA Board
- Industry-wide technical & regulatory matters — General Instructions, weighing rooms, veterinary cover, medical standards — negotiated BHA / RCA / HG
- Welfare, integrity and licensing — BHA regulatory functions, unchanged

IMMEDIATE STEPS — NO CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE REQUIRED

*MNDs become practitioners by convention · Vice Chair established · Chair mandate agreed in writing before appointment
Commercial Committee replaced by the three divisional panels · BHA staff specialisation by division*