

My Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen, fellow Pony Club volunteers and staff.

Welcome to the 2014 Annual Conference and welcome to Epsom. This is the first time we have been to the home of the Derby. I do hope you enjoy your day. I am delighted to have been elected as your Pony Club Chairman for the next three years and am pleased to be able to speak to you.

By way of introduction I thought you might like a brief insight into my Pony Club Life. I was a Pony Club Member as a child who enjoyed camp, rallies and hunting something which was hard to avoid as my father and grandfather were both heavily involved with hunting in Bucks. My grandfather was even reputed to have kept many packs of hounds going through the Second World War with the supply of hound food.

I have many happy memories from The Pony Club and am the proud owner of my C Test, achieved on my slightly opinionated 13.2. In more recent years my three children were Members of the Whaddon Chase Branch and before I knew it I was District Commissioner. This led on to me becoming Area 12 Representative.

As Area Rep I have also sat on the Polo and Racing Committees. One of my many passions is Eventing and in 2012 I took great pleasure in being a Games Maker at Greenwich.

For my day job I run the mixed family farm in Buckinghamshire.

Last year your Chairman, Cherry Michell, referred to wet, wet, wet - little did she know that this year I would need to add a few more 'wets'. We have all seen the flooding. The enormous devastation to so many families and businesses will take many months and even years to recover from.

If there is an upside to this, it is the bringing together of communities for mutual self help. I know many rural areas have been providing feed, bedding and animal shelter through the NFU. There has also been help on offer within local Pony Club Branches.

As a consequence of the flooding Sport England have issued a Flooding Guidance Pack and Flood Relief Fund for all sports. Also the Government has announced “repair and renew “grants.

Last year the Board of Trustees, lead by Cherry, appointed TrioPlus, Business Consultants in Sport and Leisure, to carry out a full Strategic, Governance, Volunteer Support and Staffing Review. This major piece of work was completed in Autumn 2013 and is available on The Pony Club website for you all to read.

We are now in the exciting phase of implementation. The Board of Trustees have prioritized the recommendations made by TrioPlus. We plan to deliver these over the next 12 to 18 months to achieve the full result.

The first major reform has been to the Health, Safety and Safeguarding department. We have split the two departments and appointed a specialist consultant, Christine Gould, to lead on Safeguarding. Christine, along with the Safeguarding Working Group are updating The Pony Club policy on Safeguarding, ensuring it is fully compliant and provides ‘best practice’ for a major youth organization.

Our next area of importance is the review of Governance.

We have been able to secure the assistance of the BEF, our umbrella organization, to align The Pony Club with other sporting bodies. This streamlining activity improves our working efficiency. Furthermore this will enable us to fully participate in the Whole Sport Plan, produced by the BEF, driving equestrianism towards 2017 and beyond.

This review carries on from our restructure in 2004 and creates a modern and practical way of working. It will also remove some of the duplication work which currently occurs.

We have also re addressed the importance of training as a core value of The Pony Club. Recently you will have seen the introduction of the Rider Development Pathway leading to a two day final at Somerford Park in June this year.

This has been hugely popular already and places on the regional events are filling fast. This particular initiative is designed to identify the talented riders within The Pony Club who are ready, focused on and working towards the talent pathways of the Olympic disciplines, the British Equestrian Federation's Sport England funded Excel Talent Programme and the UK Sport Funded World Class Programme.

We also have our two Instructor Conferences; at Keysoe in Bedfordshire, and at Blackdyke near Carlisle. After listening to feedback from attendees of previous conferences, this year will be themed "refreshing rallies". Hopefully you will encourage as many of your instructors as possible to attend, both for accreditation purposes and as a chance to get together and share ideas and best practice. These open forums are invaluable to the development of The Pony Club and the professional delivery of training within the Branches and Centres.

One of the most exciting new initiatives, launched at the 2013 Annual Conference is the Young Ambassador Scheme. Later on you will have a chance to hear from some of our Young Ambassadors about what The Pony Club means to them.

Those on the scheme have each been placed on a Discipline Committee. I have been particularly impressed by the contribution they have already been making. Their input has also been useful in the design for our E Learning site, and some of the collateral used to communicate with the older members. Going forward I hope they are able to get out to many of the events this year and promote everything that is great about The Pony Club.

My Vice Chairman, Dawn Taylor, and I have made The Pony Club's engagement with the BEF a priority. We make no excuse for this.

It is vitally important that we collaborate with all the member bodies of the BEF to produce a better future for the whole sport. The two key words around this are participation and access: this is where you all come in.

It is essential that we provide all our Members with the best possible experience, and that they then tell their friends because 'referral is the best method of sales'. If every Member was to introduce just one friend we would double our membership.

However retention of our existing members is equally important. In order to do this we need to know what our Members want. As a result of the review we have been given some very clear pointers. Again we are working with the BEF towards a collaborative Youth Product that gets young people into riding, and will also help reduce the drop off that occurs at age 14+.

During the last 12 months we have listened to the views and opinions in regard to the functionality of the main Pony Club website. Using this feedback, coupled with extensive analysis of user trends and habits on our website, we have begun the process of over hauling [www.pcuk.org](http://www.pcuk.org) to better suit the needs of our Members, potential Members, Volunteers and visitors.

During the week beginning 10<sup>th</sup> March 2014 we will be releasing a reworking of the website. This will give improved usability and functionality and the development of the website will now be an ongoing priority for the IT Department. They will be constantly evaluating it so it best suits the needs of its users.

The Pony Club is also pushing forwards with the next level of its E Learning website project. This will be designed for the older members at C+ and above, but will also allow for more social interaction, the ability to record achievements and produce reports which can be integrated into CVs. This really is a very exciting prospect and we hope to deliver on this by the end of 2014.

Another challenge ahead is getting The Pony Club into schools. The government has recently announced its renewed investment into Primary School Sports in the form of a further £150 million. This funding which is allocated directly to primary schools is to increase the PE and school sport provision. This gives us a great opportunity to work with the County Sports Partnerships to persuade schools to

use some of that money to introduce their young people to equestrian activities.

A major part of the review revolves around staffing within the Pony Club office. We are pleased to announce the appointment of Iain Heaton as the Finance and Operations Director. Iain comes to us from Deloitte and is involved with UK Polocrosse. He will start in May.

You may also have seen the advertisements for assistants in the training, media/ PR and IT departments. The interviews for these positions start next week and we look forward to filling those positions very soon. There has also been an initial re-allocation of work within the office. You will start to see the benefit of this too.

Our next appointments will be of new Trustees. We have carried out a skill set audit of the existing Trustees and are now looking to appoint two or three Trustees with commercial business skills. Anybody with the necessary skills can apply in writing to me at the Stoneleigh Office.

This leaves the most important roles within The Pony Club, our volunteers.

We have read very carefully every single comment made during the review process (although of course we do not know who made them). You have provided an enormous amount of feedback. Some of these items are easily fixed and others will take longer.

Our first task is to make the job of District Commissioner and Area Representative more manageable. With the support of the office staff we will be easing some of the paperwork with better use of electronic communications, pro forma forms, etc. We are also grouping forms available to download on line in one place for easier access.

We are very aware that The Pony Club could not exist without its army of volunteers and for this we say an enormous thank you.

The centralization of Membership collection will also help reduce the burden on the Branches. We are also looking into other ways of acknowledging our volunteers.

This year our question time will be taking a slightly different form. We will still be answering submitted questions and questions from the floor but you will have noticed at the back of the room we have four boards, with four 'hot topics' on them.

During the day please do go and have a look at them, chat about the 'hot topics' with others and gather your thoughts because we want to have a conversation with you about them! As part of our time at the end of the day we will be asking you to give your feedback on them, having some discussion about them and feeding back to you on what we are taking forwards from them.

Later today we will be hearing from a number of people. We welcome Yasmin Ingham and Jacqueline Coward, two riders who have come up through The Pony Club system and are now on the pathway of a successful equestrian career.

Our Young Ambassadors will be telling us what The Pony Club means to them.

Our Training Chairman William Blane will be talking about the latest coaching and training opportunities and we will be hearing from Julian Seaman about his happiest Pony Club memories.

In essence all of these items comprise what has made The Pony Club great in the past 85 years.

Our development plans are both exciting and challenging and I hope you are all inspired by our next generation. Above all, The Pony Club remains committed to deliver our three core values – Fun, Friendship and Learning.

I hope you leave today feeling motivated by the next year and the longer term future of The Pony Club. In doing so you are helping us be the best equestrian youth organisation in the world.

