

Worshipful Company of Farriers Equine Veterinary Studies Award 2023

I was extremely fortunate to receive the 2023 Worshipful Company of Farriers Equine Studies Award. This was something I wanted to participate in since the beginning of vet school. Although we learn the very basics of shoeing and equine foot care, it only scratches the surface of a very important equine speciality. I spent the week shadowing David Nicholls and his company Total Foot Protection Ltd.

During the week I came to appreciate the intricacies of the profession. First, I was allowed to practice taking off shoes. This, of course is an equine veterinarian day one skill. David showed me a myriad of different ways of holding a horse's foot comfortably to make taking off shoes as simple as possible. Throughout the week I took off more shoes than during my entire degree. I got comfortable not only moving around the horse but also handling the tools effectively and smoothly. I also practiced hoof testing horses and how to look for subtle signs of pain as well as common sites of increased sensitivity and whether they were significant or not. Furthermore, David gave me some reference documents to record my findings with each horse, which I am hoping to use during my career.



David spent the entire week teaching me crucial aspects of foot care focussed on areas not discussed during my studies. Firstly, he taught me how to map a foot correctly and assess any distortions. By practicing foot mapping, I came to appreciate how horses can have very asymmetrical feet that may not be entirely obvious until you take out the ruler and measure it out. I became confident with hoof mapping and got many resources to delve deeper into understanding foot distortion and its causes. In addition, hoof mapping helped me develop an understanding of foot biomechanics and how to assess trim and shoeing of each foot. This is a noteworthy addition to the toolbox that can be used when assessing lameness. Furthermore, we discussed foot asymmetry and its causes, as well as how to handle such asymmetries and hopefully prevent horses being born with or developing them. Moreover, we considered how the hoof changes with different environmental conditions and how to correctly protect it from these changes to keep the hoof wall healthy.

I was shown how to use leverage testing to assess comfort. This method of testing is not commonly used by veterinarians, although it represents a very useful tool for cases of mild lameness and discomfort. We leverage tested several horses and closely monitored their behaviour to figure out their preferred foot balance and subsequently which shoe modification was best for them. David was fantastic about noticing even the most subtle behavioural changes in the horses, which could indicate a potential problem or discomfort the horses were facing.

Laminitis is a very common problem in horses, often requiring close communication between veterinarian and farrier. David provided me with the tools and knowledge to learn how to handle this emergency and effectively discuss treatment alongside the farrier. We analysed various treatment options and their pros and cons in different situations. I discovered a wide variety of remedial shoes that I did not encounter during my veterinary studies, ranging from Styrofoam pads to clogs made of different materials. We talked about their application and how to monitor comfort. I am looking forward to using this new knowledge in my future patients to provide them with the best possible care.

Total Foot Protection Ltd. has a huge collection of different types of shoes and items related to the horse's hoof. We thoroughly discussed different shoes and how they interact with the horse's pathology and surfaces they are worked on. This was enormously interesting and gave me a much better insight into therapeutic shoeing and how we can help the horse move more comfortably by understanding the biomechanics behind this movement. As someone passionate about equine sports medicine, I had some lengthy conversations about shoeing for comfortable movement as well as desirable conformation and current trends in shoeing sport horses. Despite an intense week of learning, I still feel like I have only scratched the surface of hoof care and I am grateful that I know experts I can contact for advice!

On my last day I was fortunate to participate in a farrier CPD event. Here many aspects of the profession were discussed, and I got a deeper understanding of the profession and the current issues faced by many farriers. In addition, I learned about the use of gait analysis and how it can be employed for foot balance. During this event, I spoke to numerous farriers, pondering the vet-farrier relationship and how it could be improved in the future. We analysed the importance of good communication and how to best talk about simple and complicated cases. This experience opened my eyes to the struggles farriers can have with vets and vice versa.



As a result, I will endeavour to build good and lasting relationships with the farriers I will be working with in the future. There is so much both professions can gain from working well together.

Overall, this experience has been exquisite, and I will urge every vet student interested in equine practice to apply. I am so grateful for David and everyone at Total Foot Protection Ltd. for sharing their wisdom with me and for gifting me the tools that I will use to remove shoes from my future patients. I would also like to thank Dr David Bolt for giving me a chance to undertake this placement and Dr Lydia Brown for coordinating everything around it. Finally, I would like to thank Mark and Tessa Spriggs for letting me stay with them and providing me with delicious food. I have learned an immense amount during these five days and cannot wait to put this knowledge in practice during my veterinary career in the future.

Anetta Slobodová
Final Year Veterinary Student
Royal Veterinary College



