

THE RIDING A DREAM ACADEMY

ANNUAL REVIEW
2024-25



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The Riding A Dream Academy has gone from strength to strength in 2024–25, breaking records, expanding our reach, and opening more doors into racing for young people than ever before. This year, we proudly worked with over 400 students – nearly double the number from 2023–24 (210) and a huge increase from just 27 in our pilot year of 2021–22. It's a testament to the momentum behind our mission, the support and vision of our funders and the appetite there is for the unique opportunities we provide amongst the young people with whom we work.

This was also our first full year as part of the British Racing School (BRRS), which brought exciting new opportunities for integration and collaboration. Naomi Lawson continued to lead and manage all Academy activity while also stepping into broader responsibilities at BRS. We welcomed fresh leadership within our programmes: BRS Rider Coach Sarah Ashley became the lead instructor for our Scholarship and Residential programmes; Grace Allan took the reins of our Taster Day programme; and Sharon Ingram lead on Regional Taster Days. Additionally, thanks to the support of Katrina Archer-Rand, Head of Fundraising, we significantly strengthened our fundraising strategy and capacity during the year.

The achievements of our young people continue to inspire us. Sienna Anderson (Scholarship 2021–22) became the second Academy rider to compete in the Magnolia Cup at Goodwood, finishing a thrilling second for trainer Charlie Fellowes for whom she works. She's blazed a trail for the next wave of talent, with three more Academy students eligible to compete for the coveted Academy place in the 2026 race which Goodwood offer us each year. In another landmark for the Academy, Uwitonze Wenham Beckford (Scholarship 2022-23) became the first Academy student to be shortlisted for the Godolphin Thoroughbred Industry Employee Awards in the Newcomer category.

Our presence on the track is only growing. Aamilah Aswat, last year's Magnolia Cup rider, is being supported to pursue her Conditional Jockey's License by trainer Kim Bailey, while two more students are on exciting pathways – one aiming for an amateur license and another set to ride in a charity race in early 2026. Meanwhile, three former Scholarship students joined the inaugural British Racing School Gap Year Programme, and others began or completed the Foundation Course. Altogether, 65% of Scholarship students have either applied for or completed the Foundation Course, are working in the industry or have participated in work experience or further training, including pony racing.

We were also proud to launch a game-changing new programme in partnership with Ascot Racecourse, designed to open racing's doors to young people from Slough – one of the most disadvantaged areas in the UK. In September 2024, we welcomed 50 students from five local schools to Ascot Racing Stables for a behind-the-scenes experience like no other. Through the support of Ascot, the Shanly Foundation and Englefield Charitable Trust we have expanded the programme to include jockey fitness and equiciser sessions for over 150 students during National School Sports Week in June 2025. And the momentum continues with another 50 students once again attending Ascot this September.

We continue to be incredibly proud of the role the Academy has had in making racing more diverse and inclusive. This can be seen in wider industry metrics which show that since its founding in 2021, applications to the BRS Foundation Course from young people from diverse ethnic communities have increased to 12% of the total in 2024-25 – a phenomenal impact in just a few short years and one which we are determined to continue and expand as we head into our fifth year.

Naomi Lawson

Our Objectives

The Academy's objectives are to:

- **Create a lasting legacy** from Khadijah Mellah's inspirational achievements, that allows other young people from diverse ethnic communities, disadvantaged backgrounds and urban equestrian centres to get involved in racing and support wider diversity, participation and inclusion within the sport.
- **Identify talent** – Nurture and identify diverse talent and provide opportunities for personal growth and development for young people from these groups within the racing industry.
- **Improve diversity and inclusion** through innovative grassroots initiatives, make racing more relevant to non-traditional audiences and demonstrate how the sport is a force for good, helping to improve racing's reputation in wider society.
- **Develop new pathways** into the sport which dovetail with existing initiatives and support participants to go on to pursue a career in racing.

Our Programmes

We have three main programmes for 13-16 year olds within our pathway which increase in intensity and are designed to introduce young people to racing and support them into riding-based careers within the sport. These are:

- **Taster Days** for complete beginners who attend with their school / youth club – these are held at the British Racing School and also run at racecourses.
- **Riding A Dream Residential Weeks** which are fun riding-based introductions to the sport that cater for beginners and those with some riding experience.
- **The Khadijah Mellah Scholarship**, our flagship, year-long programme for those with the most talent and potential which starts with a residential week at the BRS and is followed by monthly sessions.

Our students

Across all of our programmes 80% of our students this year have come from a diverse ethnic background, a further increase on the 71% from last year. This is unmatched across the racing industry and far exceeds the 2-3% of jockeys who come from these communities.

Khadijah Mellah Scholarship

The Khadijah Mellah Scholarship remains our flagship programme and, in addition to the Racing Foundation's funding, has been supported by Goodwood racecourse this year who have funded one Scholarship place. The programme runs over the course of a year, starting with a Residential Week and is followed by ten monthly weekend sessions. This year we have had a new rider coach, Sarah Ashley, who has brought a renewed warmth and enthusiasm to the role, brilliantly supported by Grace Allan and Kathryn Scally.

Participants

This year, 86% of students came from a diverse ethnic background, with seven of the eight original students completing the course.

- 1 student came via connections to the now defunct St James's City Farm in Gloucester
- 2 students came via the Urban Equestrian Academy in Leicester
- 1 student came via Park Lane Sables in Teddington
- 1 student came via the Newmarket Pony Academy
- 1 student came from a commercial riding stables in London

- 2 students came via the Taster Day programme and had never ridden before the Riding A Dream Academy.

Activity

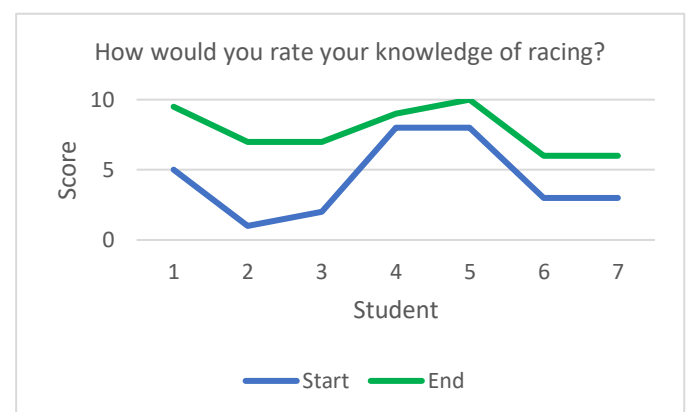
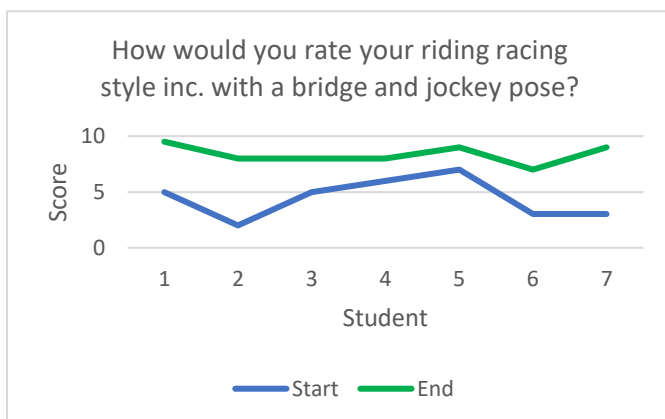
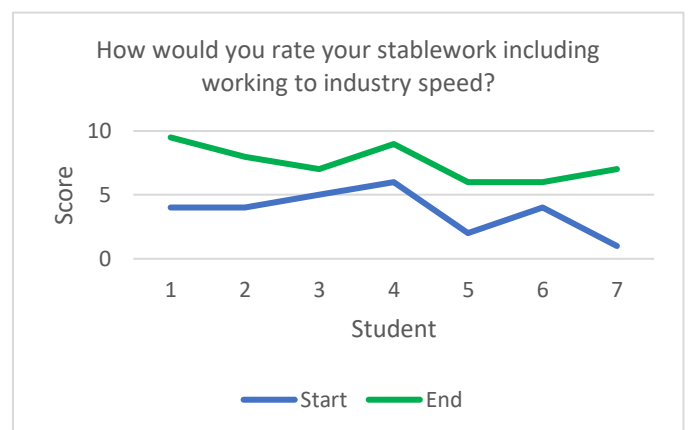
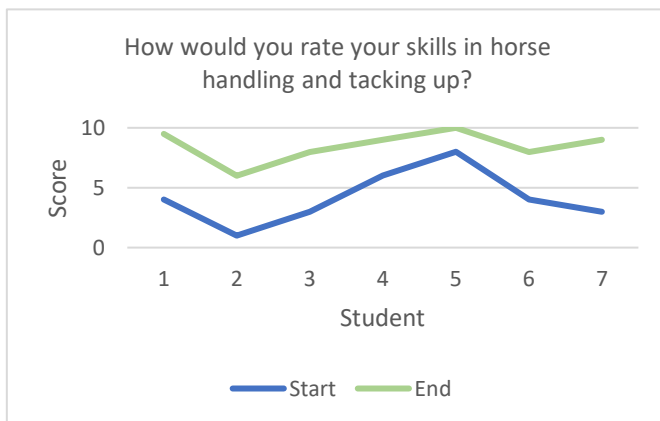
During the Scholarship students rode a variety of racehorses, progressing from the indoor school to outdoor manège, and then onto the round and straight canters. Over the Scholarship weekends students rode three times, a significant increase in the amount of riding time they enjoyed and contributing to the fact that, for the first time ever, every student graduated on a racehorse on the straight canter, including our student from the Taster Day programme who had never ridden before. In addition to the riding, students also had fitness sessions each Scholarship weekend, worked on their horse handling and stablework and took part in simulator sessions. They also went on a number of trips including to a racing stables, point to point and stud, in addition to benefitting from a lecture programme covering horse physiology, farriery and welfare. At the end of each weekend each student returned home with a personal development plan to work on, including fitness targets and racing knowledge ahead of the next session.

Key Outcomes and Impact

- **100%** of students rated their Scholarship experience 8/10 or higher.
- **71%** of the Scholarship students rated their scholarship experience 10/10.

Racing knowledge and riding

- **100%** of the Scholarship students said that their knowledge of racing; stablework, horse handling and riding had all improved, as detailed in the following charts:



Well-being

86% of students said their confidence had increased through the Scholarship

100% of students said that they knew they could do difficult things and had more resilience as a result of the Scholarship.

Future plans

- **100%** of students wanted to continue to ride racehorses.
- **71%** of students would now consider a career in racing.
- 1 student is already on the Foundation Course, having taken part in work experience earlier in the year at Amy Murphy's yard.
- A further two students have applied for the Foundation Course once their studies have finished.
- 1 student secured a place on the Non-Residential Foundation course but has decided to return to college and then university.
- 2 students have participated in additional pony races.
- 1 student taking part in work experience at George Baker's yard.

Scholarship student

"My experience has been entirely positive and if I hadn't have been on this scholarship I would 100% have not considered a career in racing."

Scholarship student

"I loved it, it was very fun and I have learnt so much about racing in general. It has inspired me to be a jockey and continue to work in racing."

Scholarship parent

"X has been highly impacted by his time at the BRS. It has fuelled further his passion in racing substantially. The Scholarship he attended was executed without fault and has had exceptional and attentive care. The team have indelibly impacted this young person in many ways including in his personal and social development. He has had the opportunity to engage with positive role models and socialise with a diverse environment. The independence he was allowed to enjoy has had a solid impact. He would like to pursue a career in racing and be considered for the Foundation Course. On behalf of us both, infinite thank yous."

Scholarship parent

"X loved the Scholarship, she loved coming to the British Racing School, she loved the way the staff taught and how supportive and encouraging they were. The facilities were so well maintained and everything was provided for her. She absolutely loved it. A heartfelt thank you to all for providing the service, for looking after the children, for teaching them and imparting the knowledge and skills they needed to thrive while here, the lessons learnt can be used in all aspects of their lives."

Scholarship parent

"It's amazing how quickly this year has flown by—and what a year it's been! It's been incredible to see the progress, not just in physical stamina and riding technique, but also in confidence. The beautiful big horses he has been riding at BRS have made me so proud! Thank you so much for the opportunity to be part of RADA. It has truly made all the difference. Without RADA's support and the encouragement and expert coaching from the team, we wouldn't have had the confidence to apply for the foundation course. You've been such an instrumental part of this journey—one of the key pieces in the puzzle that's coming together to help him realise his dream."

Residential Weeks

We held three Residential Weeks during the year in February, May and July 2025, providing 21 young people with an intensive and immersive racing experience. The weeks mimic some of the British Racing School timetable, including morning and evening stables where students get to hone their stablework skills and learn to safely handle racehorses, as well as daily riding sessions. We also run a jockey fitness session and multiple lessons in the simulator suite, as well as enhancing students' knowledge of racing through various trips to the races, Newmarket gallops and other racing entities such as studs and veterinary hospitals.

Key outcomes and impact

Well-being

- **100%** of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were proud of everything they had achieved during the week.
- **100%** of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the residential week had helped them to feel more confident.
- **95%** of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they knew they can achieve difficult things having been on the week.

Future plans

- 86% of students said they were interested or very interested in learning more about British horse racing, having attended the Residential Week.
- 86% would consider a career within racing to some extent.

In 2026 – 2028 the Residential Weeks are kindly being funded by the Alborada Trust.

Residential Week student's Mum

"X had what she described as an "epic" time. She called us every evening, excited to share detailed accounts of everything she had done and learned that day. Being away from home in an unfamiliar setting was a huge step for her. We are absolutely thrilled that her experience was so positive — this speaks volumes about the team you have in place, the robust safeguarding procedures, and the thoughtful organisation of the week itself. We're truly grateful to you all. This week has been nothing short of life-changing for her!"

Residential Week Student

"I just wanted to say thank you so much for accepting me for the residential. I really enjoyed the week and I am truly grateful for the opportunity. I have learnt so much during this time and made new friends this week. Riding racehorses for the first time was an amazing opportunity and a thrilling experience, and it has built my confidence to ride them. I hope that I will be able to continue this and work my way up to riding in the gallops, and maybe one day in an actual race! It was so exciting to watch Sienna race today [[in the Magnola Cup]] and see her dream come true. Also having the chance to listen to the farrier talk, visiting Godolphin, and the equine hospital, has given me an insight into the many careers in the equine industry. I hope that one day I will be able to work in this industry myself."

Taster Days

During the year we held 15 Taster Days at the British Racing School, catering for 142 young people who attended from a range of schools, predominantly from London and Slough. Of these 60% came from a diverse ethnic background. During the days students have the chance to ride a horse or pony, often for the first time; take part in horse handling, grooming and equiciser sessions; tour the British Racing School and find out about the different careers and courses in the sport. The days make horses and racing accessible and relevant to previously excluded groups and are a response to Racing Foundation funded GBR & RCA Diversity research in 2021 which found that,

*"Diverse ethnic communities wanted to see **initiatives that joined up with schools** and faith organisations to give wider community members more casual equestrian experiences."*

Key outcomes and impact

We receive feedback from students at the start and end of the day to measure the impact of our programmes on young people and to continually refine and improve our offerings. This year:

- **88%** of the respondents expressed an interest in continuing to learn more about riding and British horse racing. Of these,
 - **26%** of the student respondents were 'very interested' in continuing to learn more about riding and British horse racing.
- After attending the Taster Day **62%** of respondents said they would potentially consider a career in British Horseracing to some degree.
- From a list of options of possible activity after the Taster Day the most popular options were
 - 50% wanted to be able to spend more time looking after horses and ponies
 - 54% wanted to have regular keep in touch days, like the Taster Days
 - 67% wanted to have more riding opportunities
- **100%** of supervising adults agreed or strongly agreed that students had a better understanding of the courses, careers and opportunities available to them in British horse racing having attended the day.
- **100%** of supervising adults agreed or strongly agreed that students had benefitted from learning in a new environment and going out of their comfort zone having attended a day.
- **100%** of supervising adults agreed or strongly agreed that Students had developed resilience, confidence and new skills having attended a Riding A Dream Taster Day.

Two of the Taster Day students from Harris Academy Merton have been offered places on the 2025-26 Scholarship programme. In 2025-26, five Taster Days will be funded by the Angus Irvine Playing Fields Fund.

Ascot Taster Day programme

In September 2024 we ran a Taster Day week at Ascot racecourse for five schools from Slough, catering for 50 students across the week of whom 88% were from a diverse ethnic community. The rationale behind the programme has been to improve equitable access to horses and ponies in communities where this is limited, rather than relying on groups travelling to Newmarket. We also focused on Slough which is ranked within the fifth most deprived decile in England and given its proximity to Ascot Racecourse who were keen to support the initiative.

We replicated the Taster Days we run at the British Racing School at the Ascot Racing Stables, transporting five BRS horses and ponies to the course for the week along with our mobile simulator unit and kit for 50 young people. As well as being able to ride, take part in horse handling and equiciser sessions, students also had the chance to tour behind the scenes at Ascot racecourse.

Key outcomes and impact

- 100% of respondents expressed an interest in finding out more about British Racing
- 96% of respondents expressed an interest in continuing to learn more about riding and British horse racing.

"The entire day was very fun, I would love to come back and spend more time with horses, and maybe apply for Foundation Course." Taster Day Student



You can find out more about the programme here:

<https://youtu.be/oCVcrK7b7il?feature=shared>

Following on from the success of the programme, Ascot have helped to fund an expanded pathway with multiple opportunities for students to engage with the sport, with additional support from the Shanly Foundation and Englefield Charitable Trust. This has included:

- 1) Running a series of Jockey Fitness and Simulator sessions at five Slough schools in June 2025. During these sessions up to 50 students were introduced to racing through a jockey fitness session and tried out their jockey pose on a mobile simulator unit. The sessions allowed us to introduce racing to a wider school community and talent spot students to then come on the Taster Days in September 2025.



Find out more here: <https://youtu.be/014ZifT5O98?feature=shared>

- 2) Following on from these sessions ten students from each school have been selected to attend a Taster Day at Ascot in September 2025 based on their interest and aptitude during the fitness sessions. They will again have the chance to work directly with horses, ride for the first time and tour Ascot racecourse.
- 3) We are hoping to subsequently host the most talented students from the Taster Days at the British Racing School for two days, to introduce them to other courses and opportunities at the school and wider sport.
- 4) All participants will have the chance to go racing at Ascot with their school during the year.

In addition to the Ascot activity, we also hosted a Taster Day at Epsom Downs racecourse in March 2025 for 20 students from Nescot College and Epsom & Ewell High School and are set to hold an additional Taster Day at Great Yarmouth in October 2025.

Other

We have continued to work closely with urban equestrian centres and hosted a group of 20 young people from Ebony Horse Club who attended the British Racing School, toured the facilities, had a session in the jockey training suite and visited Charlie Fellowes' yard to see Ebony alumni O'Shane Marsh ride out, ahead of visiting the National Stud.



Where are they now?

We pride ourselves on being at family at the Academy and continue to support many of the students who have attended courses with us.

Scholarship Class of 2021-22

Sienna Anderson became the second Academy student to take part in the Markel Magnolia Cup and came a brilliant and fast finishing second. She rode Al Muddhafar for her trainer, Charlie Fellowes, for whom she has worked since 2023.

Her mother, Nicole told us about the impact the Riding A Dream Academy and the funding from the Racing Foundation has had on Sienna's life:

"She found out on her 14th birthday that she'd got a place on the Scholarship and I was just over the moon for her because she'd been saying since she was 8, "Mum, I want to be a jockey," so for her to get the opportunity to go to Newmarket, I was over the moon for her.

"I am just so proud. So proud of her resilience, courage and tenacity. I don't think anyone will fully appreciate the difference and positive impact that the Academy and The Racing Foundation have had her on Sienna's life – what they've done for her has been literally life changing. There is no way I could have made it happen. I don't think they comprehend what they've done for her, what



*it means firstly, to Sienna and to us as a family
- it means everything."*

Aamilah Aswat, who took part in the Magnolia Cup last year, is being supported by the Kim Bailey team to take out her conditional license this September and hopes to have her first professional rides later this year.

Rosa was one of three Riding A Dream Academy students to take part in the British Racing School Gap Year programme this summer. She is currently working at George Boughey's and will be heading to Australia for the overseas element of the programme in the new year.

O'Shane is still working at Charlie Fellowes' yard, having joined in 2022 and is tipped to take part in an Autism in Racing charity race at Newmarket next year.

We have also supported **Ibraheem** to participate in work experience at Rossdale's Equine Hospital and the Newmarket Equine Hospital since he left the Academy. He completed his A-Levels this summer and recently emailed to tell us:

"I thought I would email to let you know I got my results and have confirmed a place at the Royal Veterinary College from September. Just wanted to say thanks so much for all the support over the years and without you and the Riding A Dream Academy I could have never imagined to be in this position. From being introduced to this career at Rossdales, to your organisation of further work experiences, your efforts to help me realise my dream cannot be understated. I hope this inspires others and shows the range of careers facilitated by the Academy and I look forward to keeping you updated on my journey."

Scholarship Class of 2022-23

Uwitonze Wenham Beckford became the first Riding A Dream Academy student to be shortlisted for the Godolphin Thoroughbred Industry Employee Awards, reaching the final three in the Newcomer category.

Hezekiah is being supported by his employers Gary and Josh Moore to take out his amateur jockey's licence. We are supporting him through provision of a Jockey Coach to prepare him ahead of his race debut.

Kayanna has spent a month in Malta this year filming as a rider double on the Enola Holmes 3 set, starring Millie Bobby Brown, Henry Cavill and Helena Bonham Carter. She is now back at work at Jonjo O'Neill's for the forthcoming jumps season, having joined in 2023.

Scholarship Class of 2023-24



Ruth has completed the Foundation Course and is now working towards her Level 2 at Andrew Balding's yard. Following an internal selection process, she has been selected as the Academy student to go for a Magnolia Cup place in 2026. You can find out how she is getting on [in this video](#).



Ahmad originally came to the UK as a refugee from Syria under the resettlement programme. You can watch his extraordinary story [here which was shown on ITV Racing](#).

Eve and **Aleena** were the additional Academy students to take part in the British Racing School Gap Year programme and have recently completed the seven week Equine Student Progression Programme. They are now heading into yards in the UK ahead of taking up placements at yards in Australia in 2026.

Other students

One of our Residential Week students from 2024, Emily is currently on the Foundation Course at the BRS and a further two Residential students from that year have also applied for the course with one of them recently accepted. Where we are not able to accept students onto our courses, we always provide them with information on other options and two of these applicants have since applied for the Foundation Course. We have supported another of our Residential students from 2022 to participate in work experience at Rosedale's and Newmarket Equine Hospital ahead of her applying to Cambridge University to study veterinary science.

Press coverage and Digital

We have continued to garner positive coverage for the sport around the Academy. This has included Sienna Anderson's participation in the Magnolia Cup which was covered by [ITV Anglia](#) and [Horse & Hound](#); Ahmad Tizini's story which featured on ITV Racing and supporting coverage of Khadijah Mellah's debut as an [amateur jockey](#). Our Instagram account has grown more than 20% to over 2,030 followers this year.