

Ombudsman appointed as part of revamped handicapping appeals process

The BHA has confirmed the appointment of an independent ombudsman to oversee handicap rating appeals – one of several changes aimed at improving the handicap review process.

Licensed trainers can request a review of the handicap rating allocated to their horse, first through direct engagement with the BHA handicappers and then by submitting a formal appeal.

From 1 January 2023, the Handicapping Ombudsman will assume responsibility for adjudicating on all handicap appeals – a process currently overseen by the Handicapping Appeals Panel.

Timeform analyst and racing reporter, David Cleary, will take up the role of Handicapping Ombudsman, with Racing Ahead magazine's Ian Heitman appointed Deputy Ombudsman.

Operating independently of the BHA, the Ombudsman or, where necessary, the Deputy Ombudsman, will review all aspects of the original handicapping decision and consider representations from the trainer and the BHA handicapper.

Both trainers and handicappers will benefit from a revamped system, which includes the use of verbal rather than written evidence in a bid to simplify the review process and expedite decision-making.

A successful appeal will see the horse's rating adjusted accordingly and published as normal with the weekly handicap reassessments, while in the event of an unsuccessful challenge, the handicapper's original decision will stand.

BHA Chief Operating Officer, Richard Wayman, said:

"The BHA's handicapping team aims to treat every horse fairly and is always willing to speak with trainers to explain their decision. Most queries are resolved through this direct dialogue, but in a small number of cases this isn't possible.

"In establishing an independent ombudsman, we are seeking to improve and simplify the existing appeals system, with the aim of completing reviews in a consistent and timely manner. I'm delighted that David and Ian have agreed to take on these new positions and apply their knowledge and expertise to what can often be complicated handicap decisions.

"I'd like to take this opportunity to thank current appeal panel members for their work, in many cases over several years. I recognise that this has not always been easy, especially with panels convened at short notice and working to tight deadlines, and we are immensely grateful for their time and contribution."

BRITISH HORSERACING AUTHORITY

HANDICAPPING REVIEW PROCESS

Please note that from 1 January 2023 the appeals process will change, with a Handicapping Ombudsman replacing the Handicapping Appeal Panel. More details are available [here](#).

[WEB COPY FROM 1 JANUARY 2023]

The BHA has updated the handicapping review process, with all appeals now considered by the Handicapping Ombudsman.

The BHA's handicappers aim to treat every horse fairly and strictly on the merit of its form, using good handicapping practice and always maintaining the highest level of integrity.

We are available to provide trainers with logical and reasonable explanations for our decisions. If you have a query, please [contact us](#) directly and we will be happy to assist you.

If you have a concern or complaint about a BHA handicapping decision, please follow the steps set out below, which detail the appeals process and the role of the independent Handicapping Ombudsman.

Only licensed trainers can submit an official appeal. If you are reading this as a racehorse owner or racing manager, please consult your trainer regarding further guidance and next steps.

What do if you are unhappy with a rating (or refusal to allot a rating)

Step 1: Trainer contacts the relevant handicapper

The trainer should first establish which handicapper rated their horse. You can search for this information using [your horse's form](#) or the individual [race results](#).

Then [contact the relevant handicapper](#) via email or phone to discuss your concern(s). The handicapper will then review the horse's rating, or any non-allocation of a rating, since the horse's most recent performance.

Step 2: Trainer contacts the Head of Handicapping

If the trainer's concerns are not addressed to their satisfaction, the next step is to approach the BHA's Head of Handicapping: [Dominic Gardiner-Hill](#).

The Head of Handicapping will review the case from first principles, independent of the handicapper who originally rated the horse.

Step 3: Trainer can appeal the decision

If the trainer's concerns have not been addressed to their satisfaction via Steps 1 and 2, it is at this stage that they can request an independent review. To do this, the trainer must complete a [Handicapping Appeal Form](#).

All handicapping appeals will be considered by the **Handicapping Ombudsman**.

If the ombudsman is unavailable or, for whatever reason including any potential conflict of interest, must excuse themselves from a particular appeal, the **Deputy Ombudsman** will consider the appeal.

Both the Handicapping Ombudsman and the Deputy Ombudsman are independent of the BHA.

The handicapping week involves all weekly handicapping changes being published at 7am on Tuesday. For the results of the appeal to be included within the current handicapping week, the trainer must have completed and submitted the form by **no later than 5pm on Wednesday**.

PLEASE NOTE: A charge of **£195 plus VAT** will apply to each individual appeal. The charge will be debited from the trainer's racing account and will apply whatever the outcome of the review. The BHA will meet most of the costs associated with the ombudsman, but this payment is a contribution towards the administrative costs of the review service.

Step 4: Ombudsman contacts the trainer and handicapper to understand their positions

The ombudsman will agree a date and time to speak with the trainer, with a view to understanding the reasons for their appeal.

A separate conversation will take place between the ombudsman and handicapper, in which the ombudsman will seek to understand the handicapper's approach to the matter under review.

It is not anticipated that there will be a need for any further investigation, although should the ombudsman wish to follow up any points with the trainer and/or the handicapper, they are permitted to do so.

The trainer and handicapper will not be asked to provide written evidence as part of the appeal process.

Step 5: Adjudication

The ombudsman will consider the representations made by the trainer and the handicapper as part of reviewing all aspects of the case.

The BHA will notify the trainer of the ombudsman's decision by the following Monday (at the latest).

- If an appeal is **successful**, the ombudsman will adjust the horse's rating – or allot that horse an initial rating – according to their adjudication. Any rating revision will be published the following Tuesday morning along with the weekly handicapping reassessments.
- If the appeal is **unsuccessful**, the handicapper's initial decision will stand.

Whatever the outcome, the trainer will receive a summary of the written reasons for the adjudication from the ombudsman within seven days of being informed of the result of the appeal. These reasons will subsequently be published on the BHA website.

HANDICAPPING OMBUDSMAN

David Cleary is the Handicapping Ombudsman. David first worked for Timeform in 1983, and, among many roles, he was the Editor of the Chasers & Hurdlers Annual for eight years. He continues to work for the organisation as a racecourse reporter.

He also worked for The Sportsman during its brief existence. As well having presented on Racing UK, David is currently the President of the Horserace Writers & Photographers Association.

DEPUTY OMBUDSMAN

Ian Heitman is the Deputy Ombudsman. Ian works for Racing Ahead and is an experienced form student, attending several race meetings every week. He currently writes primarily about two-year-olds but closely follows both codes.