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Evaluation of an Equestrian Student Exchange

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INTRODUCTION: Research demonstrates the value of international academic exchange and study abroad programmes. However, this is not accessible to all students and can be costly to both the students and the institution, often requiring in depth agreements and contracts in order to meet the academic requirements set in each country.

An exchange visit was organized between University Centre Hartpury and the French National Riding School Saumur. This project started in 2015, with a 5 day visit to Saumur in February and return visit to Hartpury in October, for 10 students (2nd year coaches from Saumur working towards International level 2 and undergraduates from Hartpury who sit on a variety of equine programmes). The project is now in its 3rd year. During the visits the students gain an insight into the equestrian industry in the host country, improve their foreign language skills, ride and coach, gain an understanding of the history and development of each institution, network, experience new activities, knowledge exchange and make new friends.

AIM: To evaluate and reflect on the value of an equestrian exchange and suggest how adaptations may support future developments.

METHOD: A qualitative analysis of the feedback given in the form of focus groups and written reports from the students (n=50) and coaches (n=4). The data was analyzed meaningful units identified and grouped into general themes set out in table below.



Positive Experiences	Challenges Faced
Fun and exciting experience	Cost to the students and school
Experience of riding different horses	Level of horses not the same – create ways to add other activities
Riding improved	Limited time available for visit to town (culture)
Fun experiencing other activities: Polo, Rugby, trampolining, French Boules, vaulting, x-c running, rider fitness, watched Paul Taper Clinic, Visit to Carl Hester's yard	Organisation (classrooms, arenas, tack, horses, timetable) difficult during term time when scheduled activities still need to run
Professional development	Size of the different programmes in the 2 countries is a challenge to networking between students
Improved English, learnt new terms	Split over 2 academic years therefore not the same group of students (this will change this year)
Developed cohesion within the team	Support from the school management for staff time to plan and take part, cover need for teaching during visits etc.
Discovered new equestrian system	Limited onsite accommodation during term time. Use of hotels is an added cost
Learned and experienced the cultural differences between the two countries	Home student commitment to other classes/activities during the week
Networking opportunity	Selection of students to participate
Friendships made	
Learnt about aqua treadmills and new rehab techniques	
Experienced a pregnancy dissection	
Rode the equine simulator	
Experience University theoretical lectures	
Was pushed outside comfort zone and survived	
Students were helpful and friendly	
Excellent way to market school and programmes	
Collaboration between the two schools	
Coaches developing long lasting friendship	
Experience embedded in modules and used for assessments (live briefs)	
Opportunity of knowledge exchange: staff and students	



Key developments have been to link to curriculum:

- French students teach English students in Dressage through the week then teach these students in their level 2 assessment, in English
- 2 English coaches assist in the level 2 assessment
- English students write a reflective report and presentation as a 'live' assessment contributing to their Undergraduate Degree