

Federation actions resulting from the 2023 Health of Riding Establishments Survey

Survey headlines

In March 2022, working in tandem with the British Horse Society (BHS), the Association of British Riding Schools (ABRS+), The Pony Club (PC) and Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA), British Equestrian (BEF) undertook ground-breaking research into the health status of the United Kingdom's riding centres.

A comprehensive survey was sent to nearly 1,700 riding centres, around 1,200 of which are affiliated with a member body and around 500 that are council-licensed, to investigate capacity, facilities, staffing and activities provided, as well as the main challenges faced around viability, costs, marketing and profitability, and the impact of Covid on these factors. Responses were received from 311 centres across the UK, representing around 25% of member body affiliated centres.

The standout message from the centres was they were in the midst of a supply and demand predicament, which is both a positive and negative. Interest in riding remains buoyant, but over two thirds of centres were currently struggling to keep up with enquiries and take on new clients, creating a barrier to increasing participation.

Workforce, both paid and volunteer, rising costs and horsepower were primary concerns with, on average, centres running at 75% capacity due to these issues.

Another challenge having an impact on some businesses was council licensing requirements and processes. The costs, complexity and time involved are considerable, and this is a source of frustration for some of the centre proprietors.

Action points and outcomes

The data was extensively analysed to deliver action points, with the overall aim to help our centres thrive and grow as part of the wider strategic aims of British Equestrian. Working collaboratively, we've already introduced a number of initiatives to support centres who are registered with organisations in the federation which have gone some way to help them short term with plans to work on long term viability as we strive to balance out the 'supply and demand' situation we currently face.

A working group of BHS, ABRS+, PC, RDA and BEF was established to focus on licensing

and meets quarterly to co-ordinate our lobbying to government under a united approach as we campaign for an improved, consistent process. Through a Primary Authority Relationship with The City of London, the BHS is leading and has made considerable progress towards 'assured advice' which outlines how councils should implement licensing guidance.

In addition, The Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018 have been reviewed and feedback has gone to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for their consideration.

Funding of £195,000 was made available through **British Equestrian's Together Fund** as well as £54,000 worth of resilience support, both secured from Sport England to help centres with their recovery and to grow and develop post-Covid. The Together Fund projects highlighted that some centres need governance support advice to be able to unlock grants to support current and future financial challenges. BEF has engaged organisations to provide an overview of legal structures and has employed consultants to assist Riding Centres to review and change their legal and governance structures.

The **BHS and the ABRS+** are also helping their approved centres with **financial skills and business support workshops**.

The Pony Club has **supported their Linked Riding Centres** by helping to keep riders engaged in non-ridden activities, utilising The Pony Club Badge Training Pathway, as Centres navigate the current horsepower and staffing challenges. This has offered a way for Centres to continue to build a client base with reduced demand on existing resources. The Pony Club also **increased the revenue share** of Centre Membership to offer greater financial support and Pony Club Centre Coordinators continue to offer ongoing guidance and resources to help maintain fun, friendship and the horsemanship skills needed for riders of the future.

Workforce support has come from the **Career Transition Fund established by the BHS** to help them progress qualifications while **British Equestrian launched a new coaching bursary programme** which funds new or existing coaches up to fifty percent of the course and/or assessment costs for a number of different coaching qualifications provided by member bodies. The BEF received 169 applicants and just over £18,000 of support went to 51 coaches to help with their BHS, ABRS and Pony Club qualifications.

Additionally, British Equestrian commissioned a **research project to map the skills and expertise required and provided by each of the coaching qualifications** we have across the Federation, plus the systems and processes we or our member bodies have to approve, recommend and track additional learning for our coaches. The analysis is helping us to understand where the CPD gaps may be in helping coaches to progress through qualifications and the information gleaned will help to raise awareness and understanding of the learning opportunities available through our member bodies and across our landscape. The mapping activity will raise opportunities for collaboration and sharing resources and ensure that British Equestrian and our member bodies provide an improved, more relevant, clear and consistent service to our coaching workforce.

The **BHS introduced their 'Second Chance' project**, piloted in 2019, through which BHS Approved Centres can apply to rehome an RSPCA pony, and BHS covers the travel costs and the rehoming fee. So far 83 horses and ponies have been successfully rehomed in BHS Approved Centres, which has gone some way to helping with the issue of sourcing affordable, suitable horses whilst also ensuring experienced homes for these rescue horses.