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National Breeding Services

**An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara**
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine



Review of Studbook Inspection Processes

Delivered by



**HORSE SPORT
IRELAND**

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Acronyms

ANSF	Association Nationale du Selle Français
App	Approved
CEM	Contagious Equine Metritis
CIR	Concours Inter-Régional
CPBS	Connemara Pony Breeders Society
CP	Connemara Pony
CSI	Concours de Saut International
CSIO	Concours de Saut International Officiel
DAFM	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (IRE)
DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (NI, UK)
EIA	Equine Infectious Anaemia
EVA	Equine Viral Arteritis
FEI	Fédération Équestre Internationale
FFS	Fragile Foal Syndrome
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
HWSD	Hoof Wall Separation Disease
HSI	Horse Sport Ireland
ICCPS	International Committee for Connemara Pony Societies
IRCPB	Irish Cob Part Bred
ID	Irish Draught Horse
IDHSC	Irish Draught Horse Society of Canada
IDHSGB	Irish Draught Horse Society of Great Britain
IDHSNA	Irish Draught Horse Society of North America
IEVA	Irish Equine Vets Association
IRC	Irish Riding Cob
ISH	Irish Sport Horse
ISP	Irish Sport Pony
KBP	Kerry Bog Pony
KBPCS	Kerry Bog Pony Cooperative Society
KWPN	Koninklijk Warmbloed Paardenstamboek Nederland
LP	Linear Profiling
NBS	National Breeding Services
NA	Not Approved
OH	Over-Height
PA	Preliminary Approved
PRec	Preliminary Recognised
Rec	Recognised
RID	Registered Irish Draught
SApp	Supplementary Approved
TIH	Traditional Irish Horse
BWP	Belgian Warmblood
WBFSH	World Breeding Federation for Sport Horses

1

Introduction and Methodology



1.1 Introduction

Ireland's equine studbooks are structured around Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) approval to operate, with a number of recognised studbooks and breed societies, each responsible for safeguarding the identity, integrity, and development of their respective breeding programmes. Horse Sport Ireland (HSI) is the National Governing Body for equestrian sport in Ireland, officially recognised by the Fédération Équestre Internationale (FEI), Sport Ireland, the Olympic Federation of Ireland, Paralympics Ireland, and Sport Northern Ireland. HSI operates the National Breeding Services fund under contract from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) and operates the studbooks for the Irish Sport Horse (ISH), Irish Draught Horse (ID), Irish Sport Pony (ISP), Irish Cob (IRC), and Irish Part-Bred Cob (IRCPB), as well as administering the Kerry Bog Pony (KBP) studbook on behalf of its co-operative society. In parallel, the Connemara Pony Breeders' Society (CPBS) remains independent, maintaining full control of the Connemara studbook, inspections, and governance.

The Irish Sport Horse and Irish Sport Pony studbooks are focused on producing animals capable of excelling at the highest levels of FEI disciplines. To support this goal, the inspection process incorporates a veterinary evaluation alongside loose performance and, for certain stallions, ridden assessments. These measures are designed to ensure that only horses with the athleticism and soundness required for top-level sport are approved for breeding.

The Irish Draught Horse Studbook is an officially recognised designated native rare breed studbook, with the objective of conservation and breed improvement. The ID inspection process includes a veterinary assessment, loose movements and loose jumping assessment where applicable. These horses are also scored on their type, aligned to the breed standard. There are three daughter societies in operation for the Irish Draught Horse Studbook, Irish Draught Horse Society of Great Britain, Irish Draught Horse Society of Canada and Irish Draught Horse Society of North America.

Horse Sport Ireland formally took over the operation of the Irish Cob and Part-Bred Cob Studbooks in 2013. The moderation of the studbook transformed breeding and pedigree recording from orally traced lineages into an officially recognised studbook including DNA analysis. Annual studbook inspections are conducted in spring and autumn for mares and stallions aged three years and older. These inspections assess conformation, movement (walk and trot), and adherence to the breed standard, including characteristics such as their distinctive feathering, bone and temperament.

The Connemara Pony Breeders' Society (CPBS), founded in 1923, is the officially recognised Studbook of Origin for the Connemara Pony. The studbook has been a 'closed' breed studbook since 1964 with over 100,000 pony records in their official database. The Connemara Pony is officially recognised as a designated native rare breed and has 17 daughter societies worldwide, each with their own relevant studbook and collectively known as the International Committee for Connemara Pony Societies (ICCPS). Currently, ponies are voluntarily admitted to a studbook inspection based on conformation, movement, height, and genetic health, with results determining their studbook classification. Mandatory Hoof Wall Separation Disease (HWSD) testing forms part of the breeding and registration programme where parents are known gene carriers.

The Kerry Bog Pony Cooperative Society (KBPCS), formally recognised since 2005, is the approved breed society for the Kerry Bog Pony, one of Ireland's rarest equine native breeds. Once on the brink of extinction, the breed was revived from a small foundation herd confirmed by genetic testing in the 1990s. The KBP clerical function (passport issuance) is completed by HSI, while the inspection function is run solely by the breed society. Ponies are allocated to classes based on compliance with breed requirements, height, and colour¹.

In 2025, HSI commissioned a comprehensive consultation to review current inspection processes across interested sport horse studbooks. This includes the Connemara Pony Studbook, Kerry Bog Pony Studbook and across the five HSI-operated studbooks. The review was funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine under National Breeding Services.

1 Daughter societies of all reviewed studbooks are described in more detail in Appendix B.

In response to HSI's Request for Quotations, *ifac* proposed a stakeholder-led approach rooted in direct engagement with breeders, stallion owners, and inspection officials. The review methodology included on-site interviews, an inspection audit, structured surveys, and two in-depth focus groups. These were designed to gather both qualitative insights and quantitative feedback, providing a platform for open dialogue where participants could share their experiences, voice concerns, and suggest improvements. The review was commissioned by HSI, who engaged *ifac*'s Food and Agribusiness Team to conduct an independent assessment of the procedures surrounding the studbook inspection processes. *ifac*, one of Ireland's top ten professional advisory and accountancy firms, is widely respected within the agrifood and equine sectors for its expertise in governance and process evaluation. The review was commissioned to ensure fairness, transparency, and a continued commitment to excellence in the studbook inspections processes. Specifically, *ifac* Audit Services Ltd. was tasked with independently reviewing the processes used during the inspections outlined in Table 1 below and in full detail in Section 3.

This report presents the findings from the focus groups, interviews and audit as well as a literary review (Please see full details outlined in Appendix A). This aims to synthesise the perspectives of a diverse cross-section of the breeding community. It highlights key themes that emerged during the discussions, identifies systemic challenges, and outlines practical, evidence-based recommendations to enhance the integrity, fairness, and effectiveness of the included studbook inspection processes.

The insights gathered through this consultation aim to support the included studbooks in shaping a more robust and future-focused inspection framework, one that supports breeders, protects genetic diversity, and upholds the highest standards of equine welfare and performance.

1.2 Methodology

ifac carried out an independent review to gather insights from owners, breeders and inspectors and key industry stakeholders regarding the current inspections, their effectiveness, and potential improvements that enhance the robustness and integrity of the inspection process. The findings inform the future development of stallion and mare inspections, ensuring they remain fit for purpose, aligned with industry needs, and contribute positively to the breeding and performance standards of the Irish equine sector. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining quantitative and qualitative primary research with a review of relevant international and domestic literature. The aim was to ensure a comprehensive understanding of stakeholder perspectives and benchmarking against international best practices.

1. Literature Review

In order to establish a strong foundational understanding prior to any fieldwork or event attendance, *ifac* first conducted a thorough literature review. This included an in-depth assessment of the 5 current HSI-operated studbooks, the Connemara Pony Studbook and the Kerry Bog Pony Studbook, as well as equine studbook inspection processes in Ireland, covering eligibility criteria, assessment frameworks, communication protocols, and appeals procedures. The review also encompassed all publicly available information on the HSI, CPBS and KBPCS websites, including published policies, inspection guidelines, scoring systems, and breeder-facing communications. This provided a clear and complete picture of how the inspection process is formally structured and communicated to Irish breeders and owners.

To broaden this understanding and inform the development of well-grounded recommendations, the review also examined international best practices in leading sport horse breeding nations. Specifically, the team analysed studbook inspection frameworks and governance models from:

- The Netherlands (KWPN - Royal Dutch Sport Horse)²
- Germany (Hanoverian Sport Horse - Hannoveraner Verband)³
- France (Selle Français^{4, 5, 6})

2 KWPN Royal Dutch Sport Horse Website: [KWPN-horse](https://www.kwpn-horse.nl/)

3 Hannoveraner Verband Studbook Inspections Website: [Studbook Inspections: Hannoveraner Verband](https://www.hannoveraner-verband.de/en/studbook-inspections)

4 Selle Français Breed Selection Program: [French Saddle Stud Book \(ANSF\)](https://www.sellefrancais.com/en/breed-selection-program)

5 Selle Français Website: [French Saddle](https://www.sellefrancais.com/en)

6 Selle Français Stallion [Ranking Website](https://www.sellefrancais.com/en/stallion-ranking)

This comparative review highlighted the key principles, procedures, and support systems used in other successful contexts, creating a benchmark for evaluating Irish practices. Conducting this structured analysis in advance allowed the *ifac* team to approach subsequent fieldwork - including studbook inspections, stakeholder surveys, and focus groups - with a fully informed perspective and clearly defined evaluative criteria.

2. Survey Distribution and Data Collection

Primary data was collected through structured surveys distributed in two phases, in-person at studbook inspections and subsequently online to targeted breeder pools in the respective studbooks.

In-Person Surveys:

Surveys were administered by *ifac* directly to breeders and owners attending various studbook inspections across the country. The following events were included:

Table 1 Inspection Surveys

Breed	Date	Venue	Responses
Irish Sport Horse, Irish Sport Pony and Irish Draught Stallion	20th/21st March 2025	Cavan Equestrian Centre*	63
Connemara Pony - Colts	8th April 2025	Creagh, Ballinasloe	16
Irish Cob/Part-bred Cob	9th April 2025	Kildare	6
Irish Sport Horse, Irish Sport Pony and Irish Draught Mare	15th April 2025	Arklow	19
Connemara Pony-Fillies	22nd April 2025	Moycullen, Galway	24

* *Ifac-audited inspection*

In total, 128 completed responses were collected through face-to-face engagement at these inspection events. The surveys included a mix of closed and open-ended questions to gather both quantitative metrics and qualitative insights.

Online Survey:

Following the in-person phase, on the 24th of April 2025, HSI circulated the same survey to the operators of the Connemara Pony Studbook, to the Kerry Bog Pony Cooperative Societies and via email to all breeders and owners who had completed a studbook inspection in each of the five HSI operated studbooks since 2020, including distribution through relevant Irish Draught daughter societies. This resulted in an additional 332 responses when the survey closed on the 4th of June 2025, bringing the combined total to 460 responses.

The online distribution allowed for broader geographic representation and input from breeders and owners who were not present at the 2025 inspection events. The surveys collectively formed the core dataset used for analysis in this report.

3. On-Site Inspection Audit

To ensure an objective evaluation of the inspection process beyond participant feedback, two auditors from *ifac* Audit Services Ltd. conducted an independent review during the 2025 Stallion Selections at Cavan Equestrian Centre. This event was selected by *ifac* for audit due to the greatest level of potential stakeholder attendance. Their assessment focused on procedural integrity, transparency, compliance with published criteria, and stakeholder communication.

The auditors reviewed relevant inspection guidelines in advance and attended the event to observe all key inspection stages, including veterinary checks, conformation and movement assessments, and linear profiling. They shadowed an Irish Draught Horse inspection group throughout the full process and conducted interviews with inspectors, HSI staff, veterinarians, and participants.

Their observations confirmed structured governance and operational efficiency but also identified areas for improvement, including inspector availability, vet panel independence, and conflict-of-interest protocols. These findings were used to validate and complement stakeholder feedback, contributing to a balanced and evidence-based evaluation of current inspection practices.

4. Focus Group Sessions

To supplement the survey findings with deeper qualitative insights, two *ifac* facilitated focus group sessions were held at the Midlands Park Hotel in Portlaoise. These sessions were designed to encourage open discussion on experiences with the current studbook inspection process and to explore opportunities for improvement. Out of 115 owners, breeders and inspectors who were invited, 19 attended over the two focus groups. Due to circumstances beyond the report's control, in-person attendance was limited, with some last-minute cancellations.

- 17th June 2025 – 14 attendees
- 27th June 2025 – 5 attendees

In the first focus group held on 17th June, participants included breeders of Irish Draughts, Connemaras, Traditional Irish Horses, and Irish Sport Horses, as well as mixed breeding. In the second focus group on 27th June, there were Irish Draught breeders, Irish Sport Horse breeders, and a breeder working across multiple breeds. Breeders from all studbooks were represented at the focus groups apart from the KBP, owing to non-availability. Each session was moderated by a neutral facilitator from *ifac*, with two *ifac* staff members present to transcribe discussions in real time. The sessions followed a semi-structured discussion guide focusing on transparency, consistency, feedback mechanisms, and broader system challenges. Participant contributions were anonymised during analysis.

5. Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the surveys was compiled and analysed to identify trends, satisfaction levels, and areas of concern. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise numerical responses, while qualitative responses and focus group transcripts were thematically coded and categorised. The combined data sources allowed for triangulation of findings and validation of key themes across multiple formats.

6. Limitations

While the survey response rate was strong, particularly for the online survey, all participation was voluntary, and therefore some degree of self-selection bias may be present. The second focus group had a relatively small attendance, which may limit the diversity of views captured during that session. Both focus group sessions were held at a single location in the Midlands Park Hotel, Portlaoise. While this central venue was selected for accessibility, it may have limited participation from breeders and owners based in more remote or distant regions. As a result, the views captured in the focus groups may not fully reflect the geographic diversity of stakeholders across Ireland. Nevertheless, the overall volume and range of data provide a robust foundation for the conclusions and recommendations presented in this report.

2

Studbook Inspections Overview



2.1 Inspection Oversight and Governance

Horse Sport Ireland (HSI) is contracted by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) to operate the studbooks for the Irish Sport Horse, Irish Draught Horse, Irish Sport Pony, Irish Cob, and Part-Bred Irish Cob. It also administers the studbook for the Kerry Bog Pony on behalf of the Kerry Bog Pony Co-Operative Society. While HSI administers the passporting function of the Kerry Bog Pony studbook, the Kerry Bog Pony Co-Operative Society (KBPCS) itself remains independently responsible for the breeding programme, studbook inspection, classification, and conservation of the breed. In contrast, the Connemara Pony Breeders' Society (CPBS), which is also approved by DAFM to operate, retains full independence, overseeing its own studbook activities, such as: passporting functions, breeding programme, fees, and inspections.

In each of its five studbooks, HSI carries out the inspection and classification of stallions, mares, and geldings under each specific breeding programme's defined aims and objectives. HSI's [HorseSource](#) database contains the digital records and pedigree for these breeds with over 500,000 records available. In addition to its studbook responsibilities, HSI manages its equine database – CapallÓir, (formerly Irish Horse Register) and delivers the DAFM-funded National Breeding Services (NBS) programme.

The responsibilities of the HSI, CPBS and KBPCS involve the maintenance and continual updating of their respective studbook rules and eligibility criteria, ensuring that all processes align with evolving breed standards and regulatory expectations, appointing both inspectors and veterinary professionals, as well as running the training courses for incoming inspectors equipping them with the expertise necessary to carry out evaluations accurately and fairly. In addition, each organisation manages the logistics and coordination of their own inspection events nationwide and oversees classification decisions including designations such as Approved – Not Approved (ISH/ISP) or Class 1 – Class 3 (ID, IC, ICPB, CP, KBP) and ensures the timely publication and recording of results in each respective studbook.

2.2 Current Studbook Inspection Process in Ireland

The general aim of these inspections is to assess the breeding potential of animals through both phenotypic and genetic evaluations. Assessments incorporate performance testing at selection, performance in sport, and genetic diversity metrics.

Upon arrival, all horses must be checked in at the main registration desk. During this process, owners are required to:

- Present the horse's passport
- Record the bridle and handler numbers
- Sign a declaration confirming adherence to the inspection process rules, refraining from doping and any other misconduct

2.2.1 Inspection Components

Across all breeds, the evaluation process includes the following core areas:

- **Movement** – Evaluation of gaits and freedom of movement in-hand and, where applicable, under saddle or loose.
- **Conformation Assessment** – Conducted using a linear profiling system (45 traits for ID and 37 for ISH/ISP and 38 for CP colts and 29 for CP fillies) and upper beam scoring. Linear profiling creates a numerical and graphical representation of a horse's physical traits, aiming to establish a consistent, evidence-based assessment standard.
- **Athleticism** – Assessment of physical ability, often via loose jumping or loose movement in an enclosed space (Not mandatory for IRC and IRCPB mares or any animal in the KBPCS).
- **Veterinary Assessment** – Includes clinical examination, soundness checks, and (for ID/ISH stallions) detailed x-ray imaging and lab tests (ISH/ID).
- **Pedigree Assessment** – Review of sire and dam lineage for breed suitability and genetic diversity.

2.3 Differences Identified

Main Differences in Inspection Process between Stallions and Mares/Geldings

Stallions, across all breeds, are held to a higher veterinary standard compared to mares and geldings, primarily because of their potential to sire many foals and thus have a substantial influence on the genetic makeup of the breed population.

Mare inspections have a more simplified procedure, with no jumping under saddle required (as mares are frequently either in foal or post-partum), optional loose jumping and typically undergo a more basic health assessment that does not usually include advanced imaging or detailed reproductive examinations.

Geldings, being non-breeding animals, generally undergo basic vets check on the day and must not have any of the unsuitable conditions.

Main Differences in Inspection Process Between Breeds

The inspection processes across managed studbooks differ based on breed purpose, gender, with additional emphasis placed on both performance and preservation - particularly for rarer or heritage breeds (see Table 4 in the Appendix A for further detail).

Among these, the Irish Draught Horse studbook has a rigorous approach to breed standard for conservation, especially for stallions. The ID inspection process includes detailed assessments of conformation, movement, and athleticism/jumping ability, along with comprehensive veterinary evaluations such as radiographic (x-ray) screening and endoscopy. ID stallion kinship is assessed and presented to inspectors at stallion inspections, and mares kinship is monitored by the geneticist.

As is outlined in the [Irish Draught Genetic Diversity Report 2024](#), the ID is classified as an endangered breed by DAFM and as 'endangered maintained' on the Food and Agriculture Organisation's (FAO) World Watch List for Domestic Animal Diversity⁷. Thus, emphasis is on ensuring the preservation and improvement of this breed.

In contrast, the Irish Sport Horse (ISH) and Irish Sport Pony (ISP) studbooks place a greater emphasis on sport performance, aligned to the goal of the breeding programme. The ISH and ISP assessment process begins in a similar manner to the ID, up to the free athleticism assessment. ISH stallions then move on to second and third stage assessments as detailed below:

- **Stage 1:** Stallions must be a minimum of three years of age to be presented for the Stage 1 inspection in the ISH studbook. Stallions undergo a veterinary examination (including X-Rays) and an assessment of their conformation, movement and athleticism using linear scoring. Movement is assessed both in-hand and loose, and athleticism is assessed by means of loose jumping. Older stallions can opt to have their athleticism assessed under saddle. Stallions that meet the inspection and veterinary requirements are invited to participate in the Stage 2 inspections.
- **Stage 2:** Stallions must be a minimum of four years of age to be presented for the Stage 2 inspection which is a ridden assessment. Stallions are required to complete a course of six to eight fences ridden by their own rider and by a test rider appointed by HSI⁸. Each stallion undergoes a further veterinary examination and an assessment of their gaits and athleticism under saddle. Stallions that meet the veterinary and inspection requirements in the Stage 2 inspections are classified as 'Preliminary Approved (PA)' and proceed to Stage 3.
- **Stage 3:** 'Preliminary Approved (PA)' stallions aged between four and fourteen years of age undergo Stage 3 of the assessment process which involves a review of the stallion's own performance and/or his progeny's performance. This classification will be reviewed annually between the ages of six and fourteen years and stallions that are deemed to have sufficient performance/progeny performance are upgraded to 'Approved'. Stallions with insufficient performance/progeny performance by the age of fourteen years can be re-classified as 'Not Approved 1 (NA1)'.

7 [FAO World Watch List for Genetic Animal Diversity](#)

8 [Irish Sport Horse Studbook Stallion Selections PDF](#)

The Traditional Irish Horse (TIH) is a category within the ISH studbook based on pedigree, applying the same inspection routes but with specific pedigree requirements. The Traditional Irish Horse must only have the following breeds recorded in their pedigree: Irish Sport Horse, Irish Draught, Thoroughbred, and Connemara Pony⁹, any unknown ancestors must be born before 1982.

The Irish Cob and Part-Bred Irish Cob focus on preserving traditional type and character. Stallions and mares are primarily assessed on breed type and movement, with no mandatory endoscopy, radiographs or testing for EIA, EVA, CEM or FFS. DNA samples are taken from all horses on the day of inspection. There is no performance assessment or linear profiling for the Irish Cob or Part-Bred Cob, however both breeds do adhere to a 16-trait inspection score sheet, with a 1 – 5 Likert scale to score each of the 16 traits.

The Irish Sport Pony (ISP) stallions follow a similar format to that of the ISH. Classifications of Approved, Approved Over Height or Preliminary Approved in the main section of the ISP Studbook in Ireland are eligible to be classified as Approved in the ISH Studbook. The ISP combines conformation and movement assessment with loose jumping for stallions; mares are judged in-hand and loose, with jumping optional. As a relatively new studbook, ISP has fewer ISP Approved stallions, where additional complementary genetics are introduced via the studbook cross breeding programme.

The Connemara Pony and Kerry Bog Pony inspections are managed independently of HSI. Their inspection and classification procedures are overseen by their respective breed societies - the CPBS and KBPCS who provide an overview of this process in their Breeding Programmes^{10, 11}.

Connemara Ponies undergo a visual inspection for type, with conformation and movement being used in the inspection evaluation and comparison with the breed standard. All colts and mares are inspected by two inspectors on a hard surface, standing at opposite ends. The pony is required to stand, walk and trot in a straight line. Mares will be let loose in an enclosed area to show free movement, and stallions will be loose for free movement and jumped up to 90cm with two different inspectors.

Lastly, the Kerry Bog Pony (KBP) operates under a conservation-focused inspection framework, designed to primarily safeguard health, conformation, and traditional type to produce characteristically recognisable Kerry Bog Ponies. Both stallions and mares are assessed similarly on basic health, conformation, and movement, with no performance criteria. This breed places the greatest focus on heritage conservation, rather than sport or physical testing, and has parity between male and female assessments.

See Table 4 of comparison in Appendix A



⁹ TIH Breeds

¹⁰ <https://kerrybogpony.ie/>

¹¹ CBPS Breeding Programme

2.4 Inspection Outcomes

2.4.1. Classification

Irish Sport Horse



The Irish Sport Horse Studbook evaluates sport performance as a key component of its classification and rating system, aligning with its overarching breeding objective of producing top-level sport horses. Stallion classifications such as Approved (App), Recognised (Rec), Preliminary Recognised (PRec), Preliminary Approved (PA) and Supplementary Approved (SA), as well as mare and gelding designations like Select and Supplementary Select, are all based in part on the horse's performance in relation to the studbook assessment.

Stallions in the ISH studbook are classified as Approved if they meet veterinary, conformation and performance standards, often through performance testing or through the success of their progeny. Recognised stallions are foreign bred performance animals standing outside of Ireland, registered in the main section of a studbook that is a full member of the World Breeding Federation for Sport Horses (WBFSH) and have met specified performance/progeny performance criteria and submit a declaration from their originating studbook stating that they have met the veterinary requirements for that studbook. Preliminary Recognised animals are foreign bred performance stallions aged between four and fourteen years old, standing outside of Ireland that are registered in the main section of a studbook that is a full member of the WBFSH and meet specified performance and studbook criteria.

Supplementary approved stallions are animals with partial pedigree that have met all veterinary and performance requirements. Preliminary Approved stallions have passed the inspection but lack full performance data, while Not Approved (NA1 or NA2) stallions do not meet the required criteria. Approved Thoroughbred or Arab stallions can also be accepted based on pedigree and conformation. Mares may also receive the Select title if they show high quality through performance, linear profiling, or progeny results.

All sport performance assessments are carried out using verified performance results and are based on the minimum criteria set in the breeding programme. In addition, the ISH studbook has an established star rating system, which provides a structured framework for evaluating competitive achievement across disciplines.

Irish Draught Horse

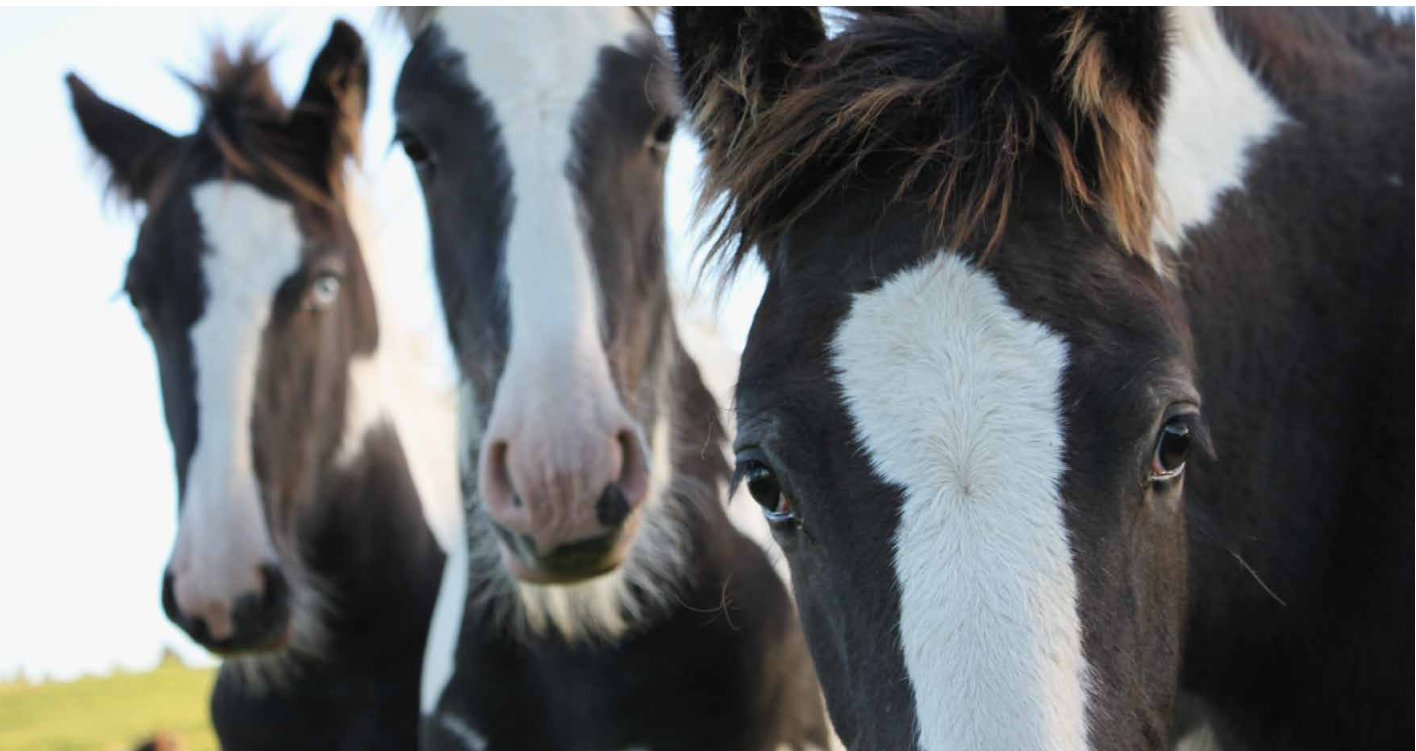


The Irish Draught Horse Studbook classifies stallions, mares, geldings, and foals into a structured system based on pedigree, veterinary status, and selection criteria.

Stallions are divided into Class 1 (meeting full pedigree, veterinary, and selection standards), Class 2 (meeting pedigree and veterinary requirements but not selection standards), Class 3 (failing veterinary requirements), and Class 4 (uninspected). Special RID (Registered Irish Draught) categories (Great Britain, Canada, and North America) recognise previously approved stallions from filial studbooks, often treating them as Class 1 equivalents.

Mares and geldings follow a similar classification system: Class 1 (meeting all requirements), Class 2 (does not meet full selection criteria), Class 3 (failing veterinary standards), and Class 4 (uninspected). RID and ID categories preserve older classifications from pre-2011 studbooks. Foals are born into Class 4 by default.

Irish Cob and Irish Part-Bred Cob



The classification of Irish Cobs and Irish Part-Bred Cobs is governed by two separate, but closely related breeding programmes operated by HSI, each with a structured approach involving both main and supplementary sections. These programmes are designed to maintain breed standards, monitor health and type, and encourage the breeding of animals that embody traditional Irish Cob characteristics.

Irish Cobs are evaluated and categorised into four classes within the Main Section of the studbook. To qualify for this section, animals must descend from parents in the main section of a studbook of the same breed, have a verified pedigree, and be properly identified under equine passport regulations. Animals in Class 1 meet both the veterinary and inspection standards and are descended from appropriately classified parents. Class 2 animals meet veterinary but not full inspection criteria. Class 3 animals do not meet veterinary requirements and are not recommended for breeding, while Class 4 animals have not yet undergone inspection.

The *Supplementary Section* of the Irish Cob Studbook caters to animals that do not meet the criteria for the main section but may still display sufficient breed type. Classification in this section (from Supplementary Class 1 to Class 3) is determined by parentage, inspection scores (particularly a minimum of 3 for “breed type” at inspections), and veterinary assessment.

Irish Part-Bred Cobs are assessed through a similar structure, also comprising a Main Section and a Supplementary Section. Animals in the Main Section must be descended from registered parents within a recognised studbook (with one parent being recognised as a full-bred cob) and are assigned to one of four classes (1 through 4) based on pedigree, inspection, and veterinary compliance. Like their purebred counterparts, Class 1 indicates the highest level of conformation and health, while Class 4 covers those uninspected.

The *Supplementary Section* for Irish Part-Bred Cobs includes animals not eligible for the Main Section, often due to cross breeding or incomplete pedigree. However, to enter this section, animals must show at least 30% Irish Cob bloodlines or score 3 or more for breed characteristics at inspection. Within this section, classes again range from Supplementary Class 1 (meeting full veterinary and inspection standards) to Class 4.

Both breeding programmes emphasise structured assessment, including visual inspection, conformation scoring, and veterinary checks. Importantly, Class 3 animals across both systems are not recommended for breeding due to concerns over veterinary health, and subsequent genetic suitability. The cross-breeding component in the Part-Bred programme allows more flexibility in studbook bloodlines, whereas the Irish Cob programme focuses on preserving traditional Cob type and breed integrity.

The Irish Sport Pony



The Irish Sport Pony Studbook assessment follows a similar process to that of the ISH studbook. The process is designed to evaluate athletic potential, type, and suitability for sport disciplines such as show jumping, eventing, and dressage. Ponies undergo a conformation and movement assessment on both hard and soft surfaces, a veterinary inspection, and for stallions, a jumping evaluation. Linear profiling is also used, as in the ISH studbook, with upper beam scores and subjective judgments contributing to classification decisions. Classification for ISPs includes designations such as Approved, Approved Over Height, Preliminary Approved, and Entry for stallions, and Select, Select Over Height, Preliminary Select etc. for mares and geldings. Alternatively, ponies may be eligible if they are assessed as conforming to the breed's characteristics either through formal inspection or by demonstrating their ability in sport, particularly through success in FEI disciplines. To meet the performance criteria specified in the studbook rules, a 148cm show jumping pony must achieve a minimum of two double clear rounds at a fence height of 1.20m, or the equivalent in eventing or dressage. For smaller ponies, these requirements are adjusted based on the pony's height and the rider's age. The ISP breeding objective emphasises sport performance, and animals can also be assessed on progeny merit or their own sport achievements.

Connemara Pony



For Connemara ponies, assessment outcomes are adapted to reflect the breed's traditional traits while also considering sporting potential. Connemara ponies are expected to retain breed type and movement characteristics, and while some may undergo performance tests, others may be assessed through conformation and linear scoring alone. Performance evaluation may be less rigorous than for ISPs, but attention to type and soundness remains a priority. The Connemara Pony is assessed by the CPBS (Connemara Pony Breeders' Society) under their own studbook which is divided into several classes based on age, height, inspection results, and parentage.

- **Class 1** includes colts from three years of age and mares and geldings from two years, whose parents are recorded in Class 1, 2, OH, or meet amnesty criteria. Ponies must pass veterinary and visual inspections, meet strict height requirements (128–148 cm unshod), and achieve at least 80% in scoring - 320/400 for colts and 240/300 for fillies. Genetic testing for Hoof wall Separation Disease (HWSD) is mandatory for all breeding stock, except geldings, who only need to meet height criteria. Ponies must have a HWSD status of N/N or N/HWSD.
- **Class 2** has the same age, parentage, and inspection requirements as Class 1 but accepts ponies that score between 60–79% - 240/319 for colts and 180/239 for fillies - while still measuring under 148 cm.
- **Class OH (Over-Height)** is for ponies that meet all other Class 1 or 2 requirements except height, being over 148 cm; breeders must accept this classification.

- **Class 3** is the default category for all foals (once parentage is verified) and for ponies not yet inspected or that do not meet the criteria for higher classes. Mares and their offspring will remain in Class 3 unless inspected or qualified via the pre-October 31st, 2025, amnesty. HWSD/HWSD ponies will remain Class 3.

Kerry Bog Pony



Kerry Bog Ponies are recognised as one of the rarest of all native horse breeds in Ireland. Their classification is more conservation-oriented, and assessment outcomes prioritise conformation, genetic integrity, and type rather than sport performance.

For the Kerry Bog, the inspection procedure involves two stages. Stage 1 is a veterinary examination and stage 2 is a conformation and movement assessment. Ponies are then classified into one of the below categories.

- **Class 1:** Ponies that meet all inspection criteria, including height and breed standards.
- **Class 2:** Ponies that fail to meet the breed's height requirement but otherwise meet the standard.
- **Class 3:** Ponies that fail inspection due to unsoundness, poor conformation, or failure to meet other breed standards. This includes ponies displaying disqualifying traits such as visible broken colour (e.g., white body patches), one or two wall eyes, or pink pigment around the eyes.
- **Class 4:** Purebred foals born into the studbook but that have not yet undergone inspection.

2.4.2. Merit Systems

Irish Sport Horse

The Horse Sport Ireland Star Rating System is a structured, performance-based framework that awards Irish Sport Horses a merit rating from 1* to 5*, based on verified competition results in show jumping, eventing, or dressage. Mares and stallions have specific performance criteria to be met in each discipline before they can be awarded star ratings. An example of the star rating system for approved stallions is outlined below with further detail available in Appendix 2 of the *ISH Breeding Programme*¹².

¹² <https://www.horsesportireland.ie/studbooks/irish-sport-horse-studbook/>

In show jumping, a 1* rating reflects double clear rounds at National 1.40m level, or top 4 placings in FEI (Fédération Équestre Internationale) speed classes at a fence height of at least 1.40m at CSI/CSIO (Concours de Saut International/Concours de Saut International Officiel) level. While a 5* rating requires two double clear rounds at CSI5* Grand Prix or Nations Cup level over 1.60m fences.

In eventing, horses progress from two top 10% finishes at EI115 level (or CIC 2* level up to 2018 or CCI 3*-S from 2019 or higher) (1*) up to achieving two Minimum Eligibility Requirements (MERs) at CCI 4* level up to 2018 or CCI 5* -L level from 2019 for a 5* rating.

Dressage ratings begin at 1* with two placings at Prix St Georges or Intermediate I level with scores of at least 65%, increasing to 5* for horses scoring 65% or more with two placings at CDI/CDIO5* (big tour or equivalent) level.

Star ratings can be awarded based on the horse's own results or the verified achievements of their progeny. These ratings are supplementary to studbook classifications (e.g., Approved or Select) and serve to guide breeders and owners by highlighting horses with proven athletic merit and breeding potential.

Irish Draught Horses

The Irish Draught Horse Studbook Merit System is designed to formally recognise excellence in performance and showing among horses classified in Class 1 or Class 2 of the Irish Draught Studbook, as well as for those with progeny achieving at a high level. Merits are awarded at three levels - Bronze, Silver, and Gold - and are applicable across five disciplines: show jumping, eventing, dressage, driving/endurance and showing.

Merit assessments are conducted either annually or upon request and are based on results officially recorded with HSI or publicly available databases like SJI, Eventing Ireland, and FEI.

Importantly, all performance must be verifiable, and a horse must be properly classified in the Studbook to be eligible. This system not only celebrates sporting excellence but also informs breeding decisions by identifying individuals with proven or inherited athletic quality, thereby supporting the dual goals of breed conservation and performance-based improvement.

The Irish Cob

Irish Cobs and Part-bred Cobs do not undergo assessments for sport performance or star ratings such as the ISH. Routine genetic evaluation is not carried out. Performance testing is conducted via the classification assessment using a 16-trait inspection sheet. Horses are assessed on their conformation, movement, and veterinary inspection, using a scoring system from 1 to 5 scores across 16 traits, with minimum scores required for different classes.

Irish Sport Ponies

The Irish Sport Pony Studbook assesses sport performance for classification and rating purposes in line with its breeding objective. The criteria of both stallion and mare and gelding classes may involve the assessment of sport performance vis-à-vis the breeding objective.

The assessment of sport performance is based on objective, verifiable results from a combination of official sources. The main source of international performance results is the FEI database which includes results from 2006. The main source of national performance results is the Show Jumping Ireland and Eventing Ireland databases which includes results from the 1990s. Where appropriate, national governing body and sport organisations databases are used, e.g. the British Eventing database, the British Show Jumping database, the German FN database. Sport results are retrieved by Horse Sport Ireland personnel, information supplied by owners and breeders is considered.

Connemara Pony

The CPBS introduced a merit scheme in 2019 as part of its breeding programme to better understand and promote the athletic ability within the breed. This scheme is primarily used to evaluate the sire and dam contribution to athletic performance, especially in disciplines such as show jumping, eventing, dressage, working hunter, ridden and loose jumping.

The Merit Scheme acknowledges that while not all ponies will enter high-level competition, data from those that do can help identify influential bloodlines and inform future breeding decisions. The evaluation is based on subjective judgment of performance results, and considers key traits like type, conformation, movement, and athleticism, all in line with the Society's breed standard.

The scheme also places particular importance on gelding performance, recognising their potential to contribute to the genealogical record and ranking of breeding animals, even though they don't breed.

The Merit Scheme ultimately serves three purposes:

1. to support evaluation of pony athleticism alongside breeding goals.
2. to highlight the genetic value of high-performing sires and dams.
3. to encourage wider participation of ponies in competition, to thereby assess their performance and contribution to the CPBS breeding goals.

2.5 Inspector Training Programme

HSI Training

The Irish Sport Horse, Irish Sport Pony and Irish Draught Horse Studbook have established a comprehensive training programme for new trainee inspectors, funded under the Department of Agriculture's Equine Technical Support Scheme. This programme aims to ensure that trainee inspectors are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to carry out inspections effectively. Understanding how inspectors are trained is crucial for evaluating the overall inspection process.

The assessment day for trainee inspectors involves several key activities designed to test their competency in linear profiling, breed standard assessment, studbook breeding programme, communication and teamwork skills. Each trainee inspector is required to carry out an inspection process and complete a Linear Profile (LP) of a mare, which is dictated to a Horse Sport Ireland scribe. This step ensures that trainees can accurately assess and document the traits of the horses. Following the inspection process and LP completion, trainees must deliver verbal reports and inspection sheet comments to a panel of four Studbook Inspectors. This activity tests their ability to articulate their observations and communicate effectively, which is essential for maintaining high standards in the inspection process.

In addition to the practical inspection tasks, trainees are required to answer breeding programme specific questions. These questions assess their understanding of the studbook objectives and rules, ensuring that they are knowledgeable about the standards and regulations governing the breeding programme. The combination of practical and theoretical assessments provides a well-rounded evaluation of the trainee inspectors' capabilities.

The trainee inspectors are evaluated based on a detailed scoresheet that includes several criteria, with certain scoring levels varying between ISH/ISP and ID. The teamwork component evaluates how well the trainee collaborates with others during the inspection process. The section on comments assesses the quality, clarity, and accuracy of the written observations recorded by the trainee. Articulating opinion and communication skills measure how effectively the trainee can express and justify their evaluations. Time management looks at the trainee's ability to complete all tasks efficiently within the expected time frame. Professionalism and presentation focus on how the trainee conducts themselves and communicates throughout the inspection.

The Linear Profile assessment examines the trainee's ability to accurately evaluate and record a broad range of studbook-specific traits. Finally, the studbook questions test the trainee's understanding of each breed's standards, objectives, and rules.

The total assessment score is calculated out of 100 points and comprises two components: scores from the practical assessment day and the average of pre-filled 'Shadow Day' evaluations completed by Horse Sport Ireland staff.

This rigorous and comprehensive evaluation ensures that trainee inspectors are thoroughly assessed and prepared, supporting the consistency, accuracy, and credibility of the inspection system.

For Irish Cob inspections there are also specific requirements for inspectors as follows:

- To qualify as an Inspector, candidates must have been trained by the Irish Cob Studbook to judge an animal for conformation with the Irish Cob Breed Standard and have been trained by the Studbook to judge Irish Cobs for excellence of breed and good conformation. The studbook reserves the right to utilise or remove any inspector from the studbook inspection panel at any stage.
- To judge animals for conformity with the breed standard with a view to entry into the Supplementary Section. The studbook reserves the right to utilise or remove any inspector from the studbook inspection panel at any stage.

CPBS Training

An expression of interest to become a CPBS inspector was circulated to all members of the Connemara Pony Breeders' Society (CPBS). Sixty individuals responded, representing a mix of breeders, owners, enthusiasts, and members. Each applicant submitted a short description of their background in ponies and explained why they wished to take on the role of inspector. Following this, the group was informed of the dates and venues for a three-day training course held in East Galway. To secure their place, participants were required to pay a €150 fee.

The course itself combined theory and practice, with talks delivered by experts in linear profiling, loose jumping, veterinary care, farriery, and equine osteopathy. In addition, prospective inspectors had the opportunity to practise linear profiling on ponies while shadowing experienced CPBS inspectors. To qualify fully, trainees must also attend upcoming filly and colt inspections, where their scores are compared against those of current inspectors. Only when their results align with CPBS standards are they recognised as qualified inspectors.

The inspection scoring system is based on combined averages to ensure accuracy and fairness.

For filly inspections, two inspectors independently analyse the pony, complete linear profiles, and fill out the scoring table. These results are entered into the database, where the system calculates an average score and converts it into a percentage of the total marks available. However, there are two non-negotiable caveats that can result in immediate failure:

1. if the average score for legs falls below 15 out of 25, or;
2. if the score for straight movement falls below 14 out of 20.

Colt inspections follow a slightly different format, involving four inspectors. Two evaluate conformation, while the other two focus on movement and athleticism, with roles rotated throughout the day to maintain consistency. Once the inspection sheets are submitted, the office staff transfer the scores into the database to calculate the overall result. The criteria for qualification are clearly outlined at the bottom of the scoring printouts. As with filly inspections, the final score is determined by averaging the inspectors' results and converting them into a percentage. The same two caveats apply as above.

2.6 Key Findings and Recommendations

2.6.1 Findings

Finding	Description
1. Variation in inspection requirements by breed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The ID, ISH and ISP studbooks have the most comprehensive inspection process, especially for stallions, which includes evaluations of conformation, movement, and extensive veterinary checks.• In contrast, Irish Cob inspections do not use linear profiling, focusing primarily on the breed standard with less emphasis on performance attributes.• ISH, ISP and ID stallion inspections include mandatory jumping evaluations to assess performance potential, which are optional for mares of the same breed and not a requirement for Irish Cobs, or Kerry Bog Ponies, reflecting differing breeding objectives.• Connemara Ponies are evaluated through a detailed linear profiling system. Colts are assessed across 38 traits covering movement, conformation, breed standard, and athleticism, while fillies are evaluated on 29 traits. Notably, Connemara ponies are the only breed in these evaluated Irish studbooks where the linear profiling framework differs between colts and fillies, or between mares and stallions.
2. Disparity in veterinary standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stallions in the ID and ISH studbooks must complete advanced clinical evaluations (e.g., radiographs, endoscopy, reproductive exams).• This level of veterinary requirements is not generally applied to Connemara ponies, Irish Sport Ponies, Irish Cobs or Kerry Bog Ponies, where x-rays are not required.

Finding	Description
3. Use of linear profiling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ISH, ISP, and ID Inspections apply linear profiling, a structured scoring method based on subjective assessment of physical traits. • Irish Cobs and Kerry Bog Ponies place greater emphasis on meeting the breed standard and rely more on traditional, qualitative assessments, introducing greater subjectivity and reducing transparency in classification. The Kerry Bog Pony Inspection is composed of two stages: a Veterinary Examination and a Conformation and Movement Assessment but with no publicly available profiling system. Whereas the Irish Cob do use an inspection scoring sheet incorporating 16 traits, rated on a 1-5 range.
4. Classification terminology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different classification systems are used across studbooks: • Connemara ponies, Irish Draught, Irish Cob, Irish Part-Bred Cob, Kerry Bog Ponies use “Class 1, 2, and 3.” • Irish Sport Horse and Pony classifications include “Approved,” “Preliminary Approved,” and “Select.” • It is noted that these studbooks have different breeding goals and classification levels, hence the different classifications. However this can create confusion for breeders trying to compare standards.

2.6.2 Recommendations

It is noted that while drafting this report, several of the below recommendations were carried out.

Recommendation	Description
1. Standardise inspection procedures across studbooks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a unified framework for inspections that ensures minimum standards across all breeds in terms of essential documentation etc., while still allowing for breed-specific traits and goals. • Ensure greater parity in veterinary requirements, especially for stallions, to maintain consistency in welfare and breeding quality.
2. Expand use of linear profiling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider using linear profiling across all managed studbooks, to increase objectivity, consistency, and transparency in conformation assessments. • Provide training for inspectors to ensure accurate and consistent scoring using this method. • Update the CPBS Breeding Programme with the new number of traits assessed in linear profiling.
3. Increase transparency in inspection outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore objective assessment methods to support inspection based decision making. • Consider publishing anonymised inspection data/images for each classification to help breeders understand outcomes and prepare better. • Provide details on website of how standardised inspection reports are delivered to breeders/owners post-assessment, detailing scoring and reasons for classification. • Include feedback loops (e.g., post-inspection surveys or annual consultations) to gather breeder perspectives and track satisfaction with inspection processes.

Recommendation	Description
<p>4. Enhance digital communication and website usability</p>	<p>Improve and standardise breed info on the HSI and CPBS websites, especially for new or first-time users.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Streamline Navigation for Inspection Information: Approach the inspection pages from a user-first perspective, aiming to minimise the number of clicks needed to access relevant information. We recommend introducing consistent section headings for mares and stallions across all breeds (e.g., ISH, ID, ISP, Irish Cob, etc.). 2. Dates and Venues 2026: Update this from 2025 once the current season concludes. Even if dates are not confirmed, keep this section live with a note: <p><i>“Inspection dates for 2026 have not yet been finalised. This page will be updated once confirmed - expected February 2026.”</i></p> 3. How to Apply: Include application forms, deadlines, eligibility criteria, and submission instructions. 4. Inspection Process: Procedures and Guidelines: Outline step-by-step processes, veterinary and performance requirements, and what to expect on the day. 5. Inspection Outcomes: Clearly explain classification systems (e.g., Class 1/2/3, Approved, Star Ratings, Merits), appeal options, and post-inspection steps. 6. Terms and Conditions: Include relevant policies, cancellation rules, and obligations for attendees. 7. Inspection Results 2025: Post detailed results by studbook and inspection date. Archive older years where applicable. <p><i>“Inspection information for Connemara Ponies and Kerry Bog Ponies is managed independently. Please visit the CPBS website or Kerry Bog Pony Cooperative Society for details.”</i></p> 8. FAQs: Add a dedicated section with commonly asked questions. <p>E.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do I know my horse is ready for inspection? • How should I prepare my horse for inspection day? • What happens during an inspection? • Is stabling or accommodation available at the venue? • How are horses scored by inspectors? • What if I disagree with the result? • How are potential conflicts of interest (e.g. inspector/vet involvement) managed? <p>It is noted that some of these recommendations have already been executed.</p>
<p>5. KBPCS engagement and information</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Details on KBP inspector training as well as other various aspects of the KBP studbook were unavailable for inclusion in this report. This topic warrants further examination in future research or industry reviews.

3

Auditors Evaluation



As part of this project, *ifac* Audit Services Ltd. carried out an Independent Auditor's Review of the processes around the Stallion Selections for the Irish Sport Horse, Irish Draught Horse and the Irish Pony Studbooks Inspections held in the Cavan Equestrian Centre on 20th & 21st March 2025. There were 50 stallions to be inspected across the event. The auditor's review focused on the stallion selection and inspection process with particular focus on participation procedures and outcomes, including:

- The administrative and logistical arrangements for the stallion selections.
- Compliance with published procedures and criteria for Irish Draught Horse, Irish Sport Horse and Irish Sport Pony inspections.
- Transparency and consistency in the implementation of selection standards and processes.
- Communications with stakeholders including stallion owners, inspectors and HSI officials.
- Adequacy of facilities and operational support provided at the event.
- Identification of any weaknesses/areas for improvement in the inspection process.

3.1 Review Process

The review process included the following:

1. A review of the relevant stallion selection guidelines, standards in advance of the event.
2. Attendance and observation of the event March 20th, 2025, in the Cavan Equestrian Centre where:
 - a. An initial meeting was held with Denis Duggan (CEO) of Horse Sport Ireland, to clarify the objectives and expectations of the independent review.
 - b. Sonja Egan PhD, Head of Breeding, Innovation and Development in HSI provided a comprehensive overview of the event's operational structure and procedural flow.
 - c. A guided tour of the Cavan Equestrian centre was conducted by two of the HSI team, offering insight into the layout and logistical coordination of the selection process.
3. Yvonne McCormack and Deirdre Reid observed the stallion inspection process across all key stages and areas within the selection arena. Yvonne and Deirdre shadowed inspectors for ID Group 5 from the start of the inspection process right through all sections up to the final result confirmation.
4. Interviews and informal discussions with key stakeholders present at the event to include, HSI staff, Vets, Inspectors, horse owners and spectators.
5. Collection of observational notes relating to timing, flow of horses, inspection procedures and the overall running of the event.
6. Post event analysis and internal assessment by *ifac* Team.

3.2 Inspection Review

The studbooks selection process involves an assessment based on:

- Conformation
- Movement
- Athleticism

The evaluation of the above assessments is supported by linear profiling methodology. Linear profiling is an attempt to create a standardised numeric and graphed description of a horse based on its characteristics.

On the day all stallions were required to check in at the main registration desk located in the main arena. During the registration the owners:

1. Show the horses passport.
2. Record the bridle number and handler number for the horse.
3. Sign a declaration confirming the absence of doping or misconduct and adherence to inspection terms and policies.

Each stallion participating was allocated a stable for the day. The stables are located adjacent to the veterinary inspection area. The owners have the option of overnighing the horse in the stables. Photographs of the horses are taken on the day of inspection. These photos are used on the HSI website to promote the stallion.

There were 50 stallions presented (one re-present) for inspection across the various categories over the two days. Our report deals with the stallion inspections on the first day 20th March 2025.

The Inspection process was divided into four separate evaluation zones:

1. **Veterinary Inspection** – Horses must visit the veterinary inspection station for an initial registration, identity verification, health and welfare evaluation.
2. **Triangle Arena** – The area is used to evaluate and assess conformation, walk and trot in-hand movement on a defined path around the arena circuit
3. **Hard Surface** – The section evaluates the correctness of the horse's movement on a hard surface.
4. **Loose Movement** – The final area provides an opportunity to observe and evaluate loose movement and athleticism.

The Irish Draught Stallions were assessed for Class 1 or Class 2 status, focusing on breed characteristics and performance.

3.3 Auditor's Observations

3.3.1 Governance & Oversight

The auditors observed that the presence of senior HSI officials, together with a clear and well-documented registration process, made the procedure straightforward for owners and breeders. Officials were readily available to address queries, and the visible adherence to strict protocols helped build confidence in the fairness and integrity of the inspections. Applications for the 2025 Stallion selections opened prior to the event for the Irish Draught Horse, Irish Sport Horse and Irish Sport Pony. The final closing date was 30th January 2025. Applicants were required to submit forms online and adhere to specific terms and conditions outlined by HSI.

Overall stakeholders expressed confidence in the event and stallion selection process however there was an opinion that the result depended on the Inspectors you got on the day. Some were of the opinion "that the popular horses were automatically given popular results." Some stakeholders also felt that if you were in a group with all strong horses the Inspectors are unlikely to award more than one Class 1 in a group. The *ifac* auditors did not see evidence of this during the independent audit review where all three horses in the group were awarded Class 1's. It was noted that on the day there was some confusion over the numbering of horses for the event which did not correspond to the event catalogue.

3.3.2 Operational Efficiency

The initial registration and check-in procedures at the event were orderly and clear. The layout of the arena facilitated smooth flow through each of the assessment phases. Stable allocation and pre-registration ensured animals were well managed on-site. The check-in and vet areas in the arena operated efficiently and in an organised manner.

The assessments on the day ran smoothly with minimal delays.

3.3.3 Consistency and Compliance

Identity verification and gait checks were consistently applied at the vet inspections. Linear profiling provided a standardised framework for the evaluation. We reviewed a sample of the linear profiling score charts, and all were completed in a consistent manner. The signed declaration system by the owner supports ethical compliance.

3.3.4 Veterinary Oversight and Objectivity

There were two veterinarians carrying out the veterinary inspections on the day Dr Helen Webster and Dr Louis Hassett.

It was noted that there is a limited number of vets approved to carry out veterinary assessments at inspections. The small bank of vets available for the inspections increases the risk of conflicts of interest and may compromise panel independence. Some of the vets on the panel are practising vets; stakeholders outlined that these vets often had their own clinics and there may be a risk that a number of horses presenting are also patients of the clinic. A situation could arise whereby the inspection vet carries out a basic vet check of their own patients on the day of inspection. However, designated clinics independently carry out the vetting process for stallions and there is a separate veterinary x-ray panel in place to allow a double review process for borderline cases.

All horses are subject to a pre-inspection vet check that includes x-rays and wind check. All vaccinations must be up to date. Most stallions undergo a complete veterinary examination before the inspection day. As of 2026, the studbook will only facilitate stallions that have attended a designated clinic ahead of the Stallion inspection event, full veterinary examinations will no longer be permitted on the day of the inspection.

Failure to pass the veterinary inspection directly affects how a horse is classified. For example, in the Irish Draught Studbook, a failed veterinary assessment results in the animal being placed in Class 3. Owners and breeders retain the right to appeal a veterinary decision through University College Dublin. Pending the outcome of the appeal they can re-present the horse for a full inspection. This must be done at their own expense.

The bone, height & girth of the stallions are recorded. The horse's gait is also assessed. Prior to 2026, if a horse had not undergone a vet inspection prior to arrival, a full veterinary inspection was carried out on the day. There was only one full veterinary inspection on the day of the Stallion Selection in Cavan, all other horses had attended a designated vet prior to the event in line with animal identification and passporting regulations.

3.3.5 Inspector Training and Capacity

The stallion inspector panel is drawn primarily from a group of 18 individuals, which limits diversity and availability. With only a few active inspectors, the process lacks sufficient redundancy and scalability. The original 12 inspectors were trained by KWPN (Dutch Studbook). HSI ran a two-year inspector training course for inspectors. Stakeholder feedback from interviews highlighted that the training period is excessively long, which contributes to the shortage of inspectors and reduces the system's overall flexibility. However, the following overview helps explain the rationale behind this duration.

ISH/ISP/ID Inspector training is funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine Equine Technical Support funding, hence the hosting of training days are subject to funding and the annual grant call. This means that attendance at training days does not come at full cost to the participants. Following initial training, and prior to completing the assessment to join an inspection panel, trainees must shadow and linear profile at 6 inspection days. There is a limited number of inspection days available per season (7-8) and the trainee must be available to attend to complete the shadowing. In addition, there are minimum criteria that trainees must meet on assessments.

Each stallion inspection team consists of 3 inspectors and a scribe (HSI employee or other suitably trained individual) who records the comments and results of the inspection.

Only 3 inspectors are used at any one time. Depending on whether conflicts arise, an inspector can step in or out. Conflicts are identified and documented prior to the event. One person is the chairperson for the group (call person) and will call out to the scribe. If the other panels member(s) do not agree they will advise the group during the calling of the traits.

It was noted that the step-in, step-out process on the day could be improved. However, there is a limited inspector panel and there can be horses within groups that can have one or more conflicts within the group to be inspected or horses arriving down in the incorrect order. In the case of declared conflicts, the studbook should ensure that inspectors are clear on who they should step out for and when.

Auditors noted in their inspection that there is a risk that the opinion of inspectors could be influenced by the more dominating or strong individual and initial observations could be easily overturned. The process appeared in some incidences very subjective.

Inspector availability is constrained in our opinion with an over reliance on a small group of inspectors. It is recommended that a modernised training programme is developed.

3.4 Auditors Conclusions and Recommendations

3.4.1 Findings

Finding	Description
1. Event execution and stakeholder feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The 2025 stallion selection event was professionally organised and well-executed. Overall stakeholder feedback was positive and conveyed confidence in the process. However, approximately 40% of the stakeholders interviewed felt that the result depended on which inspector panel was assigned on the day. Almost 20% of stakeholders interviewed felt that there was no clear pathway to flag concerns about inspectors. There was some confusion over the numbering of horses for the event, which did not all correspond to the event catalogue.
2. Inspector objectivity and process integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The inspection review confirmed the inspectors' objectivity and fairness when awarding either Class 1 or Class 2 categories to the Stallions. There was a risk of pressure on the inspectors to award a Class 1, particularly where the horse is re-presenting. Safeguards are in place to ensure the exact same inspector panel does not recheck the horse when there is a re-present. Inspections are considered subjective; with a lot of reliance placed on the inspectors' opinions. There is a risk that less vocal inspectors could be influenced by the stronger, more dominant inspectors in the group.
3. Panel structure and oversight risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are risks identified in the inspector panel systems. These risks primarily stem from small panel sizes, long training timelines, and the absence of formalised oversight or rotation procedures for inspectors.
4. Conflict of interest and transparency concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The lack of formal selection rotation, in particular with the vets, creates potential for conflict of interest given the small professional community of vets. As the majority of the vets are practicing outside the appointment for the Stallion Selections there is a chance of a vet inspecting a horse that he/she may treat in their own clinic. This may pose a risk for the vet to give a clear result. Without reform, these issues could compromise confidence in the integrity, transparency and objectivity of the selection process.

3.4.2 Recommendations

Recommendation	Description
1. Veterinary panel reform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear transparent conflict of interests for the vet inspectors noted at the outset of the event. Expand the eligible vet pool through targeted outreach or partnership programmes. Promote upcoming tenders to try and increase the number of respondents and hence widen the pool. HSI should consider the feasibility of employing a full-time vet to oversee studbook inspections and counter any risk to independence as the full-time vet would not also be operating a vet clinic leading conflicts of interest. This vet could and should assist all studbooks where necessary.

Recommendation	Description
2. Inspector capacity development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design and launch a digital/online component of inspector training programme (12–16 weeks) based on modular competencies and field assessment. Use this to train a new cohort of inspectors annually, ensuring sufficient inspector availability.
3. Transparency & oversight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce external, independent observers at major stallion selections. Introduce more transparency over how the inspector groups are selected. Conflict of interest procedures could be enhanced through the quasi-anonymisation of horses during inspections. Under this approach, inspectors would not receive passport or ownership details and would evaluate horses purely on observable criteria. The studbook would remain responsible for confirming eligibility and participation status.
4. Governance review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct a review of stallion selection governance, including panel composition, conflict-of-interest management, and process compliance on a biennial or triennial basis. Introduce a feedback form to allow attendees to raise concerns easily, accessible via a QR code displayed on event signage and/or included in registration packs. It could be made clear in the survey that if you report a serious concern about an inspector, contact details will be required for a confidential follow up call to discuss. Ensure all horse identification numbers are clear and correspond directly with the event catalogue prior to inspections, potentially by incorporating a pre-event checklist.

In addition to the in-depth auditors’ report, the following high-level common and site-specific observations were made by *ifac* employees while conducting onsite surveys with owners and breeders. While these observations are more high-level in detail than the audit findings, they are included here to provide additional stakeholder context and perspective. No further recommendations are attached to these observations, as they were gathered informally. Importantly, no new findings emerged, as all observations aligned with those already identified by the auditors.

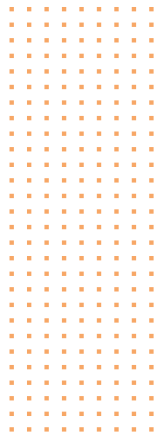
Common observations

1. At several inspections attended by *ifac*, inspectors were often grouped in a central “huddle” within the arena, which may allow dominant personalities to influence scoring outcomes.
2. Both the Galway (CP) and Arklow (ISH, ID, ISP) inspections had a notably high proportion of first-time attendees.
3. Some participants reported being unaware that stabling facilities were not available on the inspection premises, which contrasted with other venues. While this information had been communicated in advance, it appears that only the main HSI Stallion Inspections provide on-site stabling which could be a pertinent detail to add to the studbook(s) website.
4. No random doping checks were observed at any inspections other than the Stallion Inspections in Cavan.

Inspection-specific observations:

Breed	Date	Venue	Key Observations
Irish sport horse, Irish sport pony and Irish draught stallion	20th/21st March 2025	Cavan Equestrian Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large crowd. • Whole inspection took place indoors. • Sound quality of speakers was poor for announcing results. • Mixed levels of satisfaction with the inspectors among attendees. • Judges were huddled for discussion. • Horse's numbers were not matched with the event catalogue. • Video recorded. • Well organised. • Two vets in attendance. • Random dope testing.
Connemara pony - colts	8th April 2025	Creagh, Ballinasloe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partly outdoors – walk and trot (on concrete). • Judges stood separately. • Positive outlook from most surveyed. • Well organised, plenty of help available. • One vet present. • No dope testing observed.
Irish cob/part-bred cob	9th April 2025	Kildare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very few in attendance. • Many felt that there could be improvements to support the breed, with two stakeholders commenting that they thought the veterinary assessment was not thorough or strict enough. • Inspection process was shorter than in other breeds. • Vet in attendance. • No dope testing.
Irish sport horse, Irish sport pony and Irish draught mare	15th April 2025	Arklow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Queue outside the front at times. • Inspection took place indoors. • Full arena party to manage the horse loose. • Vet onsite. • Three HSI staff in attendance. • Many indicated that it was their first inspection. • Inspectors were huddled. • No dope testing.

Breed	Date	Venue	Key Observations
Connemara pony-fillies	22nd April 2025	Moycullen, Galway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspection took place partly outdoors. • Some horses had foals with them while being inspected. • Photographer on site to get photos after each inspection. • Plenty of staff on site and well organised in wet conditions. • One vet present. • No dope testing.



4

Survey and Focus Group Results



To capture a broad and representative view of stakeholder experiences, feedback was gathered through a structured survey process conducted in two phases. The initial phase involved face-to-face engagement with breeders and owners at multiple studbook inspection events across Ireland, where 128 responses were collected. These included inspections held in locations such as Cavan (20th/21st March), Ballinasloe (8th April), Kildare (9th April), Arklow (15th April), and Moycullen (22nd April). A follow-up online survey was then circulated by Horse Sport Ireland to participating studbooks, breeders and owners who had participated in HSI operated inspections since 2020, generating an additional 332 responses. In total, 460 responses were compiled. The survey combined quantitative and qualitative questions to provide both measurable data and contextual insights, forming a key evidence base for the analysis that follows.

As part of Horse Sport Ireland's ongoing review of the Studbook Inspection process, two focus groups led by *ifac* took place on the 17th and 27th June 2025 to gather insights from breeders, inspectors, and stakeholders across the country. The session, facilitated by Jamie Leonard Director of Agribusiness at *ifac*, provided a platform for open and honest discussion about the current system, its strengths, and the areas in need of reform.

4.1 Respondent Profile

Survey respondents represented a diverse cross-section of the Irish equine community. Participants included horse owners, active breeders, and studbook inspectors, offering a broad perspective on the studbook inspection process. Respondents came from across all regions of Ireland and from various Daughter Societies of each breed, ensuring a geographically representative sample. The demographic profile reflected a balance of male and female participants and included individuals of varying ages, from younger breeders and new entrants to the sector, to experienced professionals with decades of involvement in equine breeding and sport. This diversity of roles, backgrounds, and experiences contributed to a well-rounded dataset and helped ensure that the insights captured in the survey were reflective of the wider stakeholder community.

The breakdown of the type of horse/pony bred by respondents are as follows (noting that percentages overlap because some breeders are involved in breeding more than one type of animal):

- ID – Irish Draught (50%)
- ISH – Irish Sport Horse (47%)
- ISH-TIH – Irish Sport Horse-Traditional Irish Horse (13%)
- CP – Connemara Pony (33%)
- ISP – Irish Sport Pony (6%)
- IRC/ICPB – Irish Riding Cob/Irish Cob Part Bred (5%)
- KBP – Kerry Bog Pony (1%)

The studbooks in which respondents had previously completed inspections were as follows:

- ID – Irish Draught (47%)
- ISH – Irish Sport Horse (40%)
- CP – Connemara Pony (32%)
- ISP – Irish Sport Pony (1%)
- IRC/ICPB – Irish Riding Cob/Irish Cob Part Bred (3%)
- KBP – Kerry Bog Pony (1%)

94% of survey respondents had completed a mare selection inspection, 27% had completed both a mare and stallion inspection, and 6% had completed a stallion selection inspection only.

Survey respondents were most likely to present a horse for inspection less than once every three years (43%) or once a year (34%) and mainly present 1-2 horses for inspection each time (89%).

Half of the survey respondents breed 1-2 foals per year, while only 3% breed more than 20 foals per year.

Most survey respondents have been involved in breeding horses/ponies for a long period of time, with more than 70% being involved for more than ten years.

All reasons for breeding/producing/owning horses were considered important, with no option receiving less than 37%. The top three reasons given for breeding/producing/owning horses were:

1. Producing horses/ponies for sale to the commercial leisure market (60%).
2. Producing horses/ponies for competition (52%).
3. Conservation of bloodlines (48%).

At the end of the face-to-face surveys conducted during inspection visits, respondents were given the option to opt in to further engagement. This generated a contact list, and those listed were invited to participate in focus groups on three separate occasions. Out of 115 respondents emailed, 19 individuals attended the focus group discussions. The focus groups brought together a diverse mix of participants, including those involved in Irish Sport Horse, Irish Draught, Connemara, and Thoroughbred breeding. Some had decades of experience, while others were relatively new to the inspection process. This diversity ensured a rich and varied conversation, with breeders, owners and inspectors involved in both tradition and innovation.

The following breakdown reflects respondents as a proportion of unique breeders who actively participated in inspections between 2023 and 2025. This approach ensures that the results capture the views of those directly engaged in the current process, rather than the much larger pool of registered breeders who may not typically participate. Representation across breeds was as follows: Connemara 23%, Irish Draught 60%, Irish Sport Horse 57%, Traditional Irish Horse 16%, Irish Sport Pony 8%, and Irish Cob 96%.

4.2 Inspection Perception

The benefits of inspections selected were numerous, with all options bar one, receiving votes from at least 40% of survey respondents. The top three benefits of inspections identified were:

1. It allows me to enter the studbook relevant to my breeding goals (64%).
2. The classification adds financial value to my horse (62%).
3. I use the inspection results to market my horse to potential breeders/buyers (57%).

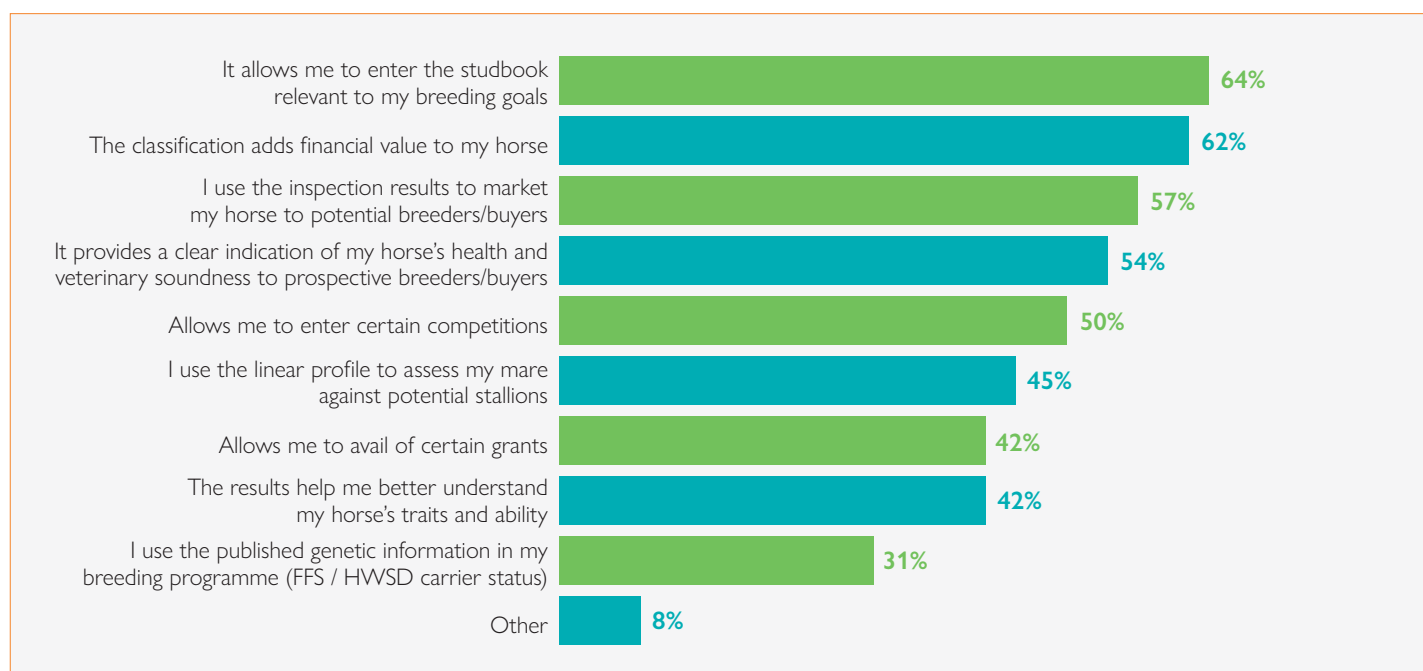


Figure 1 Survey Question: "Please tick all statements that you agree with in relation to the benefits of inspections. (Tick all that apply)"

Some survey respondents expressed broad satisfaction with the inspection process, highlighting improvements in event efficiency, the helpfulness of inspection panels, and the quality of veterinary services. Many valued the enjoyable social side to the inspections. First-time breeders appreciated the support and guidance offered during the process with one stating *“I found the inspection panel incredibly positive and helpful to me as a first-time breeder with an Irish Draught mare. They gave me valuable advice and the confidence to give breeding a go”*. Others mentioned their satisfaction with improvements in the quality of horses coming through stating that *“We are seeing fewer hereditary defects, and some have been almost eliminated”* as well as their appreciation for the effort being made by Horse Sport Ireland and participating studbooks to go out and collect feedback from horse owners and breeders to make real change for the benefit of all stakeholders.

The discussion began on a positive note in both focus groups, with several participants acknowledging improvements in the organisation and delivery of inspections in recent years. Locations such as Cavan were praised for their structure and efficiency, and first-time attendees noted the helpfulness of staff and the clarity of communication on the day. When inspections were well-organised and expectations clearly communicated, the experience was generally positive. Focus group participants also appreciated punctuality, veterinary support, and the professionalism of some inspectors. This was also conveyed through the survey results with survey respondents acknowledging improvements in how the inspections run. One respondent stated *“It’s very efficient and well run today. Other years there’d be a queue out the gate but it’s brilliant today”*.

The focus groups and surveys noted a number of challenges.

Respondent’s key concerns were:

1. I believe the inspection process is too subjective (i.e. opinion based) (49%)
2. I have concerns about fairness in the inspection process (42%)
3. I am concerned that an inspection result will negatively impact my horse’s value (33%)

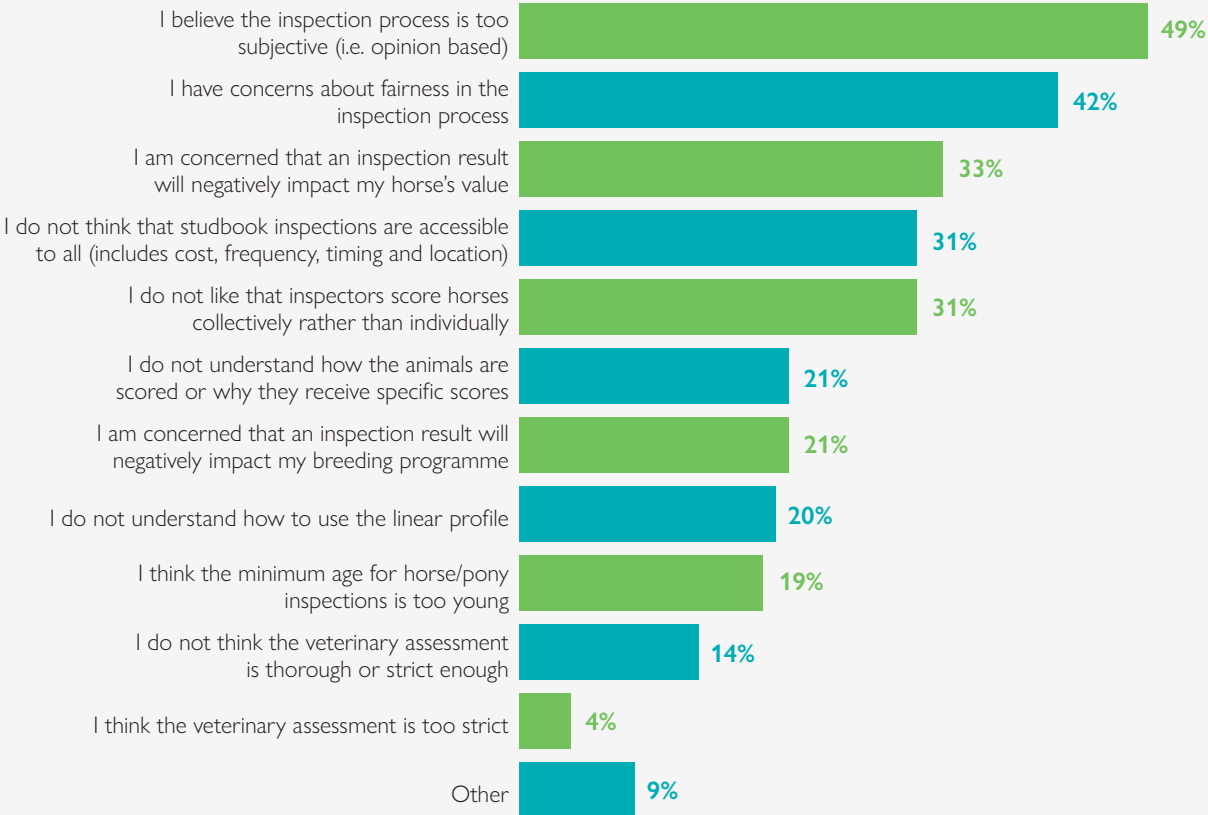


Figure 2 Survey Question: *“Please tick all the statements that reflect any concerns or challenges you have about inspections. (Tick all that apply)”*

A recurring theme which came up in the focus groups was the lack of transparency in the upper beam or numerical scoring system (i.e. not the linear profile). Many breeders admitted they did not fully understand how scores were calculated or what specific criteria were being assessed. There was a strong sense that the process was overly subjective, with inspection decisions often made without sufficient explanation. This lack of clarity left some breeders feeling disillusioned and uncertain about how to prepare their horses effectively. In the second focus group some breeders noted that even when they received high scores, the classification was not clearly communicated or published, particularly for Class 2 horses/ponies. Several survey respondents expressed their desire to receive feedback on their result with the goal of being educated on how to achieve a Class 1 *“I would like to see a better explanation of how they received their score as it would help to know what is required to pass an inspection”*.

The financial implications of inspection outcomes emerged as a key theme for both concern and benefit among survey and focus group respondents. Many stakeholders acknowledged that the classification a horse receives can have an impact on its market value. However, this perceived benefit is tempered by ongoing concerns around subjectivity in the inspection process. A recurring sentiment was that the subjective nature and limited visibility of the scoring process makes it difficult for attendees to anticipate the grade a horse may receive, which in turn undermines confidence in the process. It was dually evident that, despite subsidisations by DAFM, breeders/owners were dissatisfied with the price of preparing/bringing a horse to inspection.

Despite the challenges raised, most survey respondents reported a positive experience with the inspection process. Nearly 60% rated their overall experience as either somewhat or very positive. In contrast, 17% described their experience as negative or very negative, while 24% were neutral. Importantly, those who expressed dissatisfaction represented a broad cross-section of the survey population, with no single demographic, studbook or participant group disproportionately represented among the negative responses. This suggests that concerns are not isolated to specific segments of the community.

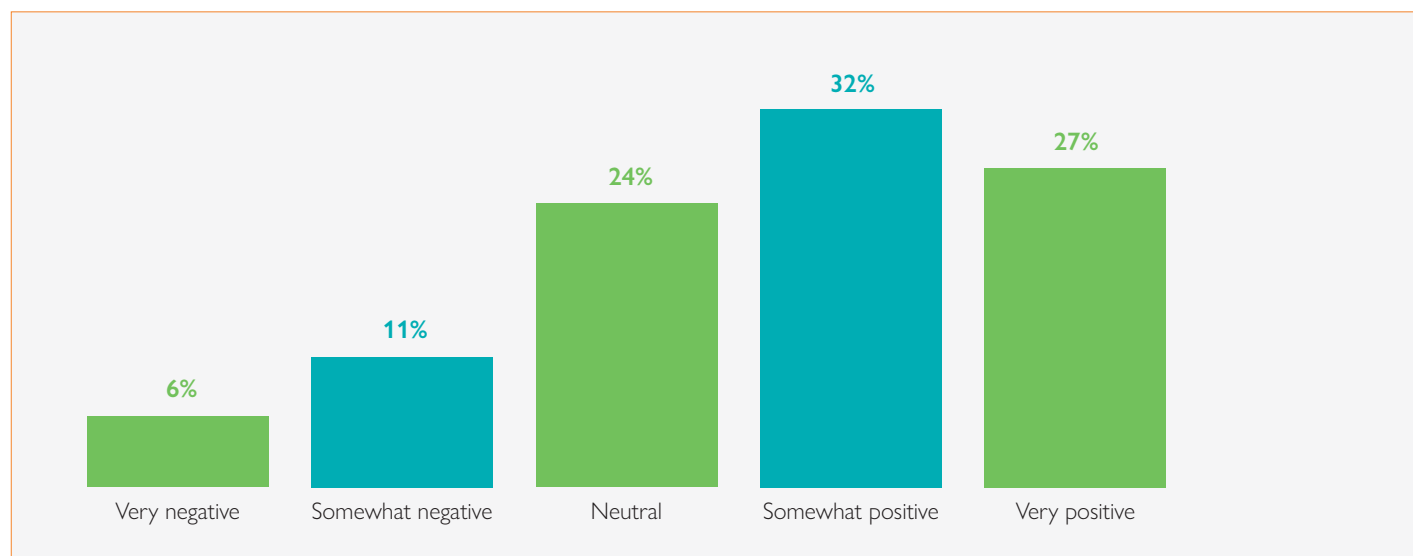


Figure 3 Survey Question: “How would you rate your overall experience with the inspection process?”

The majority of respondents appear satisfied with the information provided in advance of inspections, with only 15% indicating that they felt under-informed prior to attending. However, perspectives on the value of inspector feedback were more mixed. While most respondents found the panel’s input useful, 1 in 5 reported that they do not place value on the inspector panel’s perspective regarding their horse or pony. This suggests that while logistical communication is largely effective, there may be room to improve the perceived credibility or usefulness of feedback delivered during the inspection process.

4.3 Fairness and Transparency in Inspections

Survey responses indicate mixed views on the transparency and fairness of the current inspection process. While 42% of survey respondents do believe that the scoring and classification system is transparent (Q16 Appendix C), and 52% report that they do understand how their score is derived (Q17 Appendix C), only 43% feel that the inspection panel provides clear and constructive feedback (Q15 Appendix C).

Concerns around impartiality are particularly evident. When asked whether they believe the current inspection system is impartial and free from bias, 40% of survey respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed. One breeder commented *“Having the inspectors with their heads together and one page isn’t a good way to inspect. Each inspector should have their own grading sheet and be separate from each other. A cumulative score should be done.”* A further 32% selected a neutral response, leaving just 28% who agreed or strongly agreed. These survey findings reinforce stakeholder concerns regarding potential subjectivity within the inspection process and point to a need for greater clarity, consistency, and confidence-building measures across the system.

Concerns about bias and inconsistency were also raised in the focus groups. Several participants described situations where inspectors appeared to favour certain horses or breeders, sometimes due to personal or commercial relationships. Others noted that the same horse might receive different classifications depending on the inspector or the venue, leading to a perception of unfairness. One survey respondent stated, *“I had a horse a few years ago that was ridiculed by the judges, represented him the next year and he was given top marks - Shouldn’t have been so much of a difference, how could it be so different?”*. The practice of inspectors scoring horses collectively, rather than individually, was widely criticised, with many suggesting that independent scoring would enhance accountability and trust. Several survey respondents confirmed this criticism stating *“When mare inspections were first being mooted it was suggested that the inspectors would assess the animal independently from each other- i.e. no conferring. Now the inspectors stand together and confer on the assessment. The more dominant personality probably has the most influence on the results.”* There was also concern that some inspectors lacked sufficient connection to or understanding of the breeds they were judging, and that international judges were not always appropriate for Irish Draught horses. One survey respondent stated *“Inspectors should have a background in breeding Irish Draughts. Those who don’t are not able to dictate to those who do. Try to get it as fair as possible.”* It is evident that there is a small pool of breeders and inspectors in Ireland, and while some studbooks would value the input of foreign judges. Rare breed breeders often grapple with the need to have independence for breed judgement but are less supportive of foreign or other judges supporting the inspection process.

4.4 Technical Aspects of Inspections

Survey responses reveal a range of views on potential adjustments to specific technical elements of the inspection and classification process. Just over half of survey respondents (52%) believe that the current emphasis on pony height in pony studbook classification should remain unchanged. When splitting out this question by breed, over 50% of Connemara Pony, Kerry Bog Pony and Irish Cob breeders believed that greater emphasis should be placed on pony height for pony studbook classification compared to circa 40% in all other breeds surveyed. It was also noted that only a minority (6%) felt there should be less emphasis placed on the genetic diversity of the mare or stallion in determining Class 1, indicating broad support for maintaining current genetic evaluation standards.

There is strong backing for continued oversight of stallion classification as stallions mature or begin producing progeny, with 69% agreeing or strongly agreeing that this status should be subject to ongoing review. Opinions on competition performance as a factor in inspection outcomes were more divided: 46% felt the current emphasis on age-appropriate performance should be maintained, while 44% supported increasing its weight in classification decisions. This divided opinion was reflected across all breeds.

Linear profiling received the strongest endorsement for continuity, with 57% of survey respondents preferring to keep the system as it is. Additionally, 55% of survey respondents support the inclusion of progeny classifications in determining stallion approval status. However, support is slightly lower (45%) for placing greater emphasis on age-appropriate competition performance of progeny.

Awareness of regulatory requirements was mixed. Nearly half of survey respondents were aware that breeding programmes must comply with EU Animal Breeding Regulations, while fewer than 20% knew that these programmes must be approved by a designated competent authority (in the Republic of Ireland this is the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine). This suggests a potential gap in stakeholder understanding of the regulatory framework underpinning inspection and classification systems.

4.5 Potential Changes to Inspections

Survey responses indicate a clear appetite among stakeholders for enhanced oversight and transparency in the inspection process. Nearly half of all survey respondents (47%) expressed a desire for increased external oversight or third-party involvement to strengthen trust in inspection outcomes. Several survey respondents stated, *“In the*

interest of the breed there needs to be better oversight to maintain better standard type and pedigree and bloodlines". They were worried about horses receiving a Class 1 grade who were not true to type/meeting breed standards. This was particularly evident for those breeding Irish Draught horses after speaking to breeders at both the in-person surveys and the two focus groups. Survey data from this question, was cross tabulated across all of the different breeds and with very little variation in how respondents from each breed group answered (see Appendix A).

The potential use of objective technology or assessment tools proved to be one of the most divisive issues. While 24% of respondents support the adoption of such tools, 25% are opposed, and a significant 51% remain neutral suggesting that while there is openness to innovation, further information and clarity around implementation may be needed to build broader consensus. Several survey respondents mentioned laser measurements as well as some form of tech to measure bone width and height. However, this was met with some opposition with one respondent stating, *"Human eye, if you can't see it, it's not there."*

Introducing international judges to inspection panels received more positive support, with 56% of respondents in favour and just 21% opposed. This was reflected across all breeds, and it suggests that many stakeholders would welcome external expertise and benchmarking against international standards.

Digitalisation also emerged as a strong area of interest. A substantial 78% of respondents reported they would be interested or very interested in seeing digital records and tracking for horses that have undergone inspection. Only 6% indicated they were not interested in such a development, highlighting strong support for improved data access and traceability across the sector.

Accessibility to inspections was another issue. Inspections are typically held midweek, which poses challenges for those with work or travel constraints. Participants called for more regional venues and weekend scheduling to make the process more inclusive. Several survey respondents called for some inspections to take place in more southern regions of the country due to extensive travelling distances and long days which were difficult on their horses. Additionally, the short notice given for inspection dates was seen as a barrier, particularly when breeders needed time to prepare or apply for grants. Some suggested combining inspections with educational days to maximise attendance and value. Others proposed carrying out an expression of interest survey at the beginning of the year for studbooks to gather a rough guideline of how many horses/ponies of each studbook will be entered for that year. Respondents also advocated for making changes to draw bigger crowds to the inspections with one person stating *"Pick a weekend in the year for the inspections as it's a better time. This would help bring a crowd."*

When asked about the appeals process, most participants felt it was unclear and difficult to navigate. There was a general sense that once a decision was made, it was nearly impossible to challenge it effectively. Some breeders questioned the value of inspecting mares at all, suggesting that more emphasis should be placed on stallions and foals, where the long-term impact on breeding lines is more significant. There were also calls for better communication around eligibility.

Despite these frustrations, the group provided many constructive ideas. Many advocated for greater education and support for owners and breeders, including open days, preparation workshops, and clearer guidance on what inspectors are looking for. There was strong support for digital enhancements, such as live scoring, feedback reports, and better use of social media to share results and updates. Participants also called for a larger, more diverse panel of inspectors, with better training and a stronger connection to the breeds they are assessing. Suggestions included using iPads for real-time scoring, publishing results on the day, and providing breeders with detailed genetic and performance feedback.

The conversation concluded with each participant identifying the one change they believed would make the biggest difference. Responses ranged from improving transparency and communication to preserving traditional bloodlines and ensuring inspections reflect the true purpose of breeding programmes. While opinions varied, there was a shared commitment to improving the system for the benefit of breeders, horses, and the wider equestrian community.

Overall, both the focus groups and surveys revealed a deep passion for Irish studbook breeding and a strong desire to see the inspection process evolve in a way that is fair, transparent, and supportive. The insights gathered will play a vital role in informing the next steps for participating studbooks as they continue to refine and improve the Studbook Inspection process.

Transparency and Scoring

"The scoring system is not clear. Inspectors go into a huddle, and you don't know what's being said. If they scored individually, it would be fairer."

Bias and Conflicts of Interest

"There was an inspector and an owner who delayed the horse so that the inspector he knew would pass it. They are all 'buddies.'"

Breed Standards and Preservation

"There are mares in the field that are class four but could easily be class one. It's just someone's opinion that makes the difference."

Accessibility and Scheduling

"Inspections should be on weekends. It's not accessible for people who work."

Education and Support

"Nowadays people are sending mares away to prepare for inspection. It's not cost-effective. It needs to be more affordable." "There should be open days like the Connemara Society does. Let people see what's expected before they go to inspection."

Inspector Training and Independence

"The panel of inspectors is not big enough... If they couldn't huddle and had to mark individually with their name at the bottom, it would be a lot clearer."

One Change that Matters

"The breed standards need to be adhered to and the bigger pool of inspectors in general is urgent."

Figure 4 Focus Group Quotes

4.6 Key Findings and Recommendations

4.6.1 Findings

Finding	Description
Scoring and classification issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 59% of survey respondents would rate their overall experience with the inspection process as somewhat or very positive. • The main concern highlighted was that the current classification system is seen as overly subjective. Top three results for the concerns of inspections were: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Process is too subjective (49%) 2. Concerns about fairness (42%) 3. Results can negatively impact the horse's value (33%) • The linear profiling system was introduced to reduce subjectivity; 57% of respondents support keeping it, though many breeders felt it is poorly understood and would benefit from clearer education. • Confusion remains over how scores are calculated and criteria applied, with some breeders perceiving inconsistency or favouritism in awarding Class 1. • Only 28% of respondents believe the system is impartial, with concerns raised about inspector bias, qualifications, and conflicts of interest. However, 51% still value inspector opinions. • Just 24% of respondents support using technology/tools in inspection decisions. • A majority (56%) favour including international judges for impartiality but stress the need for strong breed knowledge to avoid misjudgement of native breeds.
Lack of transparency and communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breeders and owners felt feedback on inspection results was often unclear or delayed, especially for mares. • 42% of respondents believe scoring and classification is transparent. • Participants want more educational resources explaining how inspections are conducted; 45% felt they had sufficient information beforehand. • 78% of respondents are interested in digital records and tracking for inspected horses. • Some noted reduced visibility of Class 2 results and felt initial classifications should remain visible when animals are upgraded. • 69% of respondents support live-streamed or recorded inspections.
Accessibility and logistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timing and location were flagged as issues, with midweek scheduling and limited venues making participation difficult. Stallion inspections in Cavan (only once annually over two days) were highlighted as a barrier. • Preparation costs were considered high, particularly for smaller breeders. • Attendees felt the Cavan inspections were well organised, though poor sound quality made it hard to hear results.

Finding	Description
Breed standards and diversity concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some breeders felt standards were outdated or inconsistently applied, particularly for Irish Draught and Connemara ponies. Dissatisfaction arose from animals being awarded Class 1 despite not being “true to type.” Concerns included loss of bone in Irish Draughts and the appearance of atypical colours such as palomino. A recurring concern was lack of focus on genetic diversity, with overuse of popular sires seen as a risk to long-term breed health. Participants wanted inspections to place greater emphasis on genetics to preserve bloodlines of interest. 55% of respondents believe more weight should be given to genetic diversity in approval and classification decisions. 69% believe stallion classifications should be reviewed over time as the horse matures and produces progeny.
Oversight and appeals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholders expressed that the appeals process is difficult to navigate. Breeders feel there is no accountability when mistakes are made. It was reported that there is limited opportunity to challenge decisions or receive meaningful feedback. It should be noted that there is a process currently in place whereby owners can meet HSI and the inspector if they would like to discuss results within 30 days of inspection. Many did not acknowledge this process so more could be done to raise awareness of and promote this process. Top three results for the benefits of inspections are: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Allowed to enter studbook relevant to breeding goals (64%) Add financial value (62%) The results are used to market the horse (57%)

4.6.2 Recommendations

Recommendation	Description
Reform scoring and classification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remove the huddle and have inspectors score independently. It is suggested that all inspectors mark their own score on their own scoresheet. Scores could either then be discussed by all together to give final score or added together and divided to give an average score. In either case, if the score was disputed by owners/breeders there would be a record of the scores and inspectors would need to be able to justify their scoring decisions. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — This would be a significant change in the current process and could leave inspectors feeling vulnerable. It could also add to the amount of time required to inspect each horse, thereby limiting the accessibility of inspections to breeders. It is suggested that some inspection exercises or mock inspections are held first to assess the variability of inspector scores in each section. It would be normal to have some variation between scores but if there were certain assessment areas with significant differences between inspectors scores, this would indicate a weakness in the inspection criteria, and they would need to be updated. Consider standardising scoring criteria by developing and publishing detailed scoring rubrics for each trait, conformation, movement, athleticism with clear definitions and visual examples. These should illustrate both poor and best-in-class examples to represent the full spectrum of quality and guide consistent evaluation by inspectors and breeders. This would help ensure consistency in how traits are evaluated.

Recommendation	Description
Improve communication and education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications should be developed and tailored to be more accessible to owners and breeders. These communications should be designed to be accessible to everyone, even for lower levels of literacy. This could include video content, infographics and shorter form content. These should cover topics included in the FAQs such as such as what inspectors look for, how to prepare a horse for inspection, and common mistakes to avoid. • Enhance pre-inspection support with webinars or in-person Q&As before inspection days that allow owners and breeders to get more information and ask questions. A pre-inspection checklist could also be developed to help owners/ breeders in their preparation for the day. • Provide clear, timely feedback on inspection results. It is understood that the majority of results are now given on the day which is a very positive step in this. Ensure that any follow up communications or letters are sent without delay and that the appeals process is clearly documented. Although HSI do offer information about appeals in post-inspection communications this should be made more accessible on the website.
Enhance accessibility and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants complimented certain venues but felt that not all venues were to the same standards as others. We recommend that detailed information about inspection facilities be provided to attendees in advance, ensuring that differences between locations - such as the availability of stabling (e.g., in Cavan versus Arklow), warm-up areas, wash bays, and rest areas - are clearly communicated and understood by owners and breeders prior to their arrival.
Strengthen oversight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand and diversify the pool of inspectors, ensuring they are well-trained and breed knowledgeable. • Include international judges on inspector panels where they are specialised in the breed.
Modernise with technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Live stream inspections or where feasible record them for transparency and education. • Digitise results for owners and breeders.
Support breed preservation and diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure breed standards are regularly reviewed and clearly communicated. • Consider developing genomic information available to breeders to support their breeding programmes and the potential heritability of traits in the linear profiles.

5

International Best Practice



5.1 Netherlands: Dutch Warmbloods

The KWPN (Royal Dutch Sport Horse/Koninklijk Warmbloed Paardenstamboek Nederland) is one of the most respected and influential sport horse studbooks globally, and it is known for producing elite Dutch Warmbloods¹³. The KWPN produces world class horses in show jumping, dressage, eventing, and driving harness, each of which has their own breeding and selection criteria. The breeding goals of the KWPN are to produce athletic, rideable horses with strong soundness and health, correct conformation, willing temperament, and talent for high-level sport. Most stallions are approved as three-year-olds. Before a stallion is actually approved, it undergoes a series of selections: the first and second viewings, followed by a performance test. In addition, there are several health requirements that KWPN-approved stallions must meet.

The stallion approval process for KWPN is a lengthy process in attempt to ensure the highest quality breeding of sport horses.

- **First Round Viewing:** Pre-approval stage that occurs in autumn and only colts aged two and a half to nearly three years old are eligible. The pre-selection evaluates the conformation, movement (walk, trot, canter), and jumping of the colts. Only the top-performing colts (assessed under the following categories – dressage, showjumping, and harness horses) will be selected to proceed to the next step.
- **Veterinary Requirements:** Before entering the second viewing stage of the KWPN stallion selection process, candidates must meet strict veterinary standards. Stallions are required to be vaccinated for influenza and tetanus and undergo a full PROK radiographic examination, including x-rays of the back, neck, hocks, and stifles. Genetic testing for osteochondrosis (OC) is also used alongside radiographs to assess soundness and breeding value. Dressage, jumper, Gelder, and Harness horse stallions must complete these examinations before progressing, and successful candidates undergo DNA verification before admission to the performance test. Additional veterinary checks for respiration, semen quality, and general health (heart, eyes, teeth, legs, and movement) are mandatory, all conducted by KWPN-approved veterinarians.
- In exceptional cases, stallions that have already proven excellence in sport or breeding may be granted KWPN-recognised status, exempting them from standard conformation and radiographic requirements. These stallions are considered equivalent to fully approved sires, with their offspring eligible for full studbook registration. This system ensures that KWPN maintains high veterinary and genetic standards while allowing flexibility to reward outstanding performance and hereditary merit.
- **Second Round Viewing:** The second inspection is a key stage of the KWPN Stallion Selection, held at the prestigious KWPN Stallion Show in 's-Hertogenbosch. Stallions that passed the first viewing are re-assessed, with a strong emphasis on conformation, movement, talent, and pedigree.
 - **Jumping & Dressage Stallions (3-year-olds):** Jumpers repeat free jumping and free movement, while dressage stallions are again evaluated on free movement. The best stallions may receive a *premium*, highlighting them as future sires and guiding breeding direction.
 - **Gelderlander Stallions:** Three-year-olds are evaluated on free movement at the Stallion Show, while 4–7-year-olds are inspected in December at Ermelo under saddle or in harness. Successful stallions may proceed to the performance test.
 - **Harness Horse Stallions:** Their second inspection is also their final inspection, consisting of in-hand evaluations of walk and trot at the Stallion Show. Those selected move on to the performance test.
- Across all sections, stallions chosen at this stage advance to the performance test, the final step toward KWPN approval.
- **Performance Test:** The performance test is the final phase of KWPN stallion selection, designed to evaluate a stallion's natural aptitude, temperament, disposition, and potential as a sire. Stallions live, train, and are assessed under uniform conditions for 21 days at the KWPN centre, where they are trained by expert riders and drivers, cared for by professional staff, and closely monitored by veterinarians.
 - **Jumping & Dressage Stallions:** From 2025, the spring test will be discontinued. Stallions are now expected to complete the 21-day autumn test, which begins with a saddle presentation three weeks prior to commencement. If a stallion is not ready, he can be rejected, deferred, or recommended for further training. Offspring of stallions awaiting approval are temporarily entered in Register A or B, depending on progress and approval status.

13 KWPN Royal Dutch Sport Horse Website: [KWPN-horse](https://www.kwbn.nl)

- **Gelderlander Stallions:** Three-year-olds may complete the autumn test immediately after designation, which lasts for 28 days, with owners choosing to test aptitude either as a riding or driving horse. Afterward, they must also complete two one-day tests in the alternative discipline.
- **Harness Horse Stallions:** Their test also runs for approximately 28 days, focusing on discipline-specific training and aptitude.
- The performance test program includes daily under-saddle work, both indoors and outdoors. In addition, stallions regularly work in the horse exerciser and are turned out in safe paddocks. The stallion selection committee evaluates them repeatedly, drawing on both rider feedback and behavioural assessments in stable and training environments. Stallions can be excluded at any stage if unfit, immature, or injured.
- If successful, stallions are formally approved by the KWPN, and their complete performance reports are published in the KWPN database for breeders to consult.

The KWPN offers two performance tests for mares - the IBOP (Individual Suitability Test/Individueel Bruikbaarheids Onderzoek Paarden) and the EPTM (Mare Performance Test/Eigen Prestatie Toets Merries). Both designed to assess natural talent for sport and both tests use the same evaluation criteria and aim to identify natural aptitude for dressage, jumping, harness, or Gelder disciplines, though they differ in duration, preparation, and training intensity.

The IBOP is a one-day evaluation open to mares, geldings, and unapproved stallions aged 35 months or older. Horses are presented by their own rider or driver and assessed for their natural ability in their chosen discipline.

- Dressage horses complete an individual test followed by group work to evaluate basic gaits, balance, and rideability.
- Jumpers perform a series of fences from trot and canter, with fence height varying by age (3-year-olds: 80–90 cm; 4-year-olds: 90–100 cm; 5-year-olds and older: 100–110 cm).
- Harness and Gelder horses are tested under harness or under saddle to assess impulsion, movement, and obedience.

Horses are scored on traits such as walk, trot, canter, suppleness, posture, and willingness to work, with discipline-specific traits like jumping technique, reflexes, and scope. Each receives a maximum of 100 points, and a minimum score of 75 is required to earn the IBOP predicate, which is recorded in the KWPN database as proof of verified performance aptitude.

The EPTM (Eigen Prestatie Toets Merries) is a five-week residential training and evaluation programme held at the KWPN Centre in Ermelo. It offers a more intensive and structured assessment of a mare's potential for dressage or jumping. Horses must be at least 32 months old to participate, and the KWPN also offers a two-week pre-training option for horses that are not yet saddle-broken. The EPTM is also available to geldings and unapproved stallions.

Upon arrival, horses undergo a clinical and veterinary examination to ensure soundness and welfare. They are then trained five days a week by professional riders under the supervision of a KWPN-appointed training manager and jury, who monitor progress and adjust the programme to suit each horse's development.

- Dressage horses focus on rhythm, suppleness, and contact through basic schooling.
- Jumpers progress through ground poles to small cross-rails, verticals, and oxers, gradually building coordination and confidence.

The mares are evaluated five times during the test: an initial readiness evaluation, followed by progressive assessments of gaits, rideability, free movement, and (for jumpers) free-jumping ability. The final score reflects both their natural aptitude and development during training. Like the IBOP, the EPTM uses a 100-point scale, with 75 points required to earn the EPTM predicate.

Both tests provide valuable performance data for breeders, helping determine mares' suitability for sport and breeding. Mares that successfully complete either test may qualify for star predicates (star mare recognition), contributing to the evaluation of genetic quality within the KWPN breeding programme.

While stallion performance tests are longer and more rigorous - reflecting their role in shaping the breed - these mare tests offer a robust but welfare-conscious way to assess athletic potential and maintain high breeding standards across all KWPN disciplines.

Rankings

The KWPN relies on a point-based system, a combination of points earned from performance testing, competition results, and offspring results, to rank their Dutch Warmbloods. Stallions and mares receive different rankings called predicates based on their 'winning points.' The different predicate rankings are: Ster, Keur, PROK, D-OC, Elite, IBOP, Preferent, Prestatie, Sport, and Crown. Approved stallions are eligible for the Keur and Preferent predicated. An approved stallion can be ranked as Keur when his first crop of offspring are at least seven years old and the stallion must have a sport index greater than 140. However, if a stallion does not have the ability to pass on good conformation to his offspring, they will not receive the Keur predicate even if they meet the requirements. The Preferent predicate is the highest honour a stallion can receive with respect to quality. To be awarded a ranking of Preferent, the stallion must first hold the Keur ranking. To receive a Preferent predicate the stallion must have offspring that have a jumping index greater than 140 with reliability of at least 85%. Other predicates are earned by competing and scoring well in specific competitions or are reserved strictly for mares.

Dutch Warmbloods are highly successful in all four disciplines, dressage, jumping, eventing, and harness driving, and have seen great success internationally. Dutch Warmbloods frequently appear in the Olympic and international show jumping competitions, often scoring well. KWPN currently ranks 1st in the world for Dressage and 3rd in the world for jumping under the World Breeding Federation for Sport Horses (WBFS)¹⁴.

5.2 Germany: Hanoverian

The Hanoverian sport horse is a well-recognised breed globally for excelling in disciplines such as dressage, show jumping, and eventing¹⁵. The breeding programme is managed by the Hannoveraner Verband Society, based in Verden, Germany. The Hanoverian breeding programme's goal is to produce horses with excellent rideability and trainability, elastic, expressive gaits, strong jumping ability, good conformation, and good temperament. The selection of stallions at the Hannoveraner Verband takes place in two stages: Stallion licensing and stallion performance test. A stallion must successfully pass through both stages to be used for breeding.

Stallion licensing is the first step and serves as the initial evaluation of a stallion's suitability for breeding and is conducted in two main stages. There is a pre-selection process to identify stallions with potential for licensing where stallions are presented for free movement, free-jump, and on hard ground to be evaluated on their conformation, movement, and overall impression. Stallions are chosen from the pre-selection to move to the next step of licensing. To pass the pre-selection and move to the licensing event stallions must be two and a half years old to be licensed in-hand and three years old for licensing under saddle. Stallions are then shown on a special walking lane and on a triangle pattern to assess movement from various angles. Judges evaluate conformation, presence, and correctness of movement to score the stallion from 1-10. A score of 7.5 is required to be licensed and move on to the second part of the process - the stallion performance test.

The stallion performance test assesses the stallion's suitability for breeding based on his performance under saddle and jumping ability. The standard test for stallions lasts for 50 days, however, there is a shorter aptitude test and sport test of 3 days. These tests are conducted under a new [HLP framework](#),¹⁶ which standardises stallion performance tests for German riding horse breeds¹⁷.

Stallions:

Only about 5% of colts born each year are eligible for licensing, and fewer than half of those are approved as breeding stallions after a three-day evaluation assessing conformation, movement, free jumping, and temperament. Initially, successful stallions receive *limited breeding permission*, which can only be extended after completing further testing¹⁸.

- Three – six-year-olds must pass a 30-day ability test (Veranlagungsprüfung) to gain breeding approval.
- For *unlimited* breeding rights, stallions must then complete the 50-day performance test (Hengstleistungsprüfung) or achieve comparable results in recognised competition sport.

Over time, approved stallions are expected to gain further experience in sport to strengthen their breeding credentials.

¹⁴ <https://wbfs.com/studbook-rankings>

¹⁵ Hanoverian sport horse website: Stallions: Hannoveraner Verband

¹⁶ HLP Rules

¹⁷ <https://www.hengstleistungspruefung.de/>

¹⁸ <https://www.wbfs.com/downloads/general-assembly/2022/horse-sports-breeding-germany.pdf>

Mares:

Mares are tested at three – four years old in a performance evaluation similar to the stallions' 30-day test, assessing temperament, gaits, movement, jumping ability, and behaviour. Increasingly, young mares also compete briefly before breeding to demonstrate ability and enhance selection data.

Breeding Value Evaluation:

All results from licensing, performance tests, mare tests, and sport are compiled into an integrated breeding value assessment, which measures conformation, temperament, movement, jumping, and dressage aptitude.

Governance and Regulation:

Since 2011, performance testing and breeding value assessments have been managed directly by breeding organisations (rather than the State), under the 2007 Animal Breeding Act. Each breed sets its own detailed framework for these tests.

Testing Pathways:

Stallions can demonstrate performance in several ways:

1. A 50-day stallion performance test (after an optional 30-day ability test).
2. A combination of the 30-day test plus recognised sport performance (e.g., young horse championships).
3. For stallions aged 7 years and older, proven competition results at national S-level (advanced) (dressage/jumping) or M/L-level (M = medium, L = elementary) eventing can substitute for formal testing.

Stallions that have completed this process are registered in the Stallion Book 1 (Hb 1).

The Hanoverian studbook is divided into several categories:

- **Stallion Book I (Hb I):** In order to be entered in the Stallion Book I (Hannoveraner studbook), the stallion must have been licensed by the Hannoveraner Verband and must have fully completed and passed the performance test. He must have at least six generations of licensed and performance tested sires in his pedigree. The stallion's dam and granddam must be registered in the main studbook, the great-granddam at least in the studbook. The stallions must achieve an overall score of at least 7.5 in the evaluation of the selection criteria for external appearance for licensing.
- **Stallion Book Ib (HB Ib):** Stallions that have not yet been presented to the Hannoveraner Verband for licensing and have been licensed by another recognised breeding society and have been performance tested in accordance with their age can be entered in Stallion Book Ib. This applies to riding horse type stallions of the following societies, as their performance test system is comparable to the system used in Germany: All German warmblood breeding societies, as well as BWP, DWB, KWPN, SWB, SF, Z.Rpf. The same pedigree requirements apply as for registration in Hb I.
- **Stallion Book II (Hb II):** Stallions that have been licensed by the Hannoveraner Verband or another recognised breeding society (all German warmblood breeding societies, as well as BWP, DWB, KWPN, SWB, SF, Z.Rpf) and cannot yet present proof of performance according to age are entered in Stallion Book II. The same pedigree requirements apply as for registration in the Hb I and Ib.
- **Annex for stallions (A):** For registration in the Annex, a pedigree certificate or a birth certificate must be available. Stallions that do not meet the entry requirements for Stallion Book I, Ib or II are entered in the Annex. The entry is made without evaluation. If a stallion is in the foal book and later sires offspring, his details are automatically moved into the Annex so that his progeny can be properly registered.

Veterinary Inspections: Stallions presented for inspection must provide all required veterinary documentation, including digital X-rays and blood test results. X-rays are valid for young stallions if taken within three months prior to the inspection, while for older stallions, X-rays are valid if taken from 27 months of age onwards. Blood tests must confirm the horse's genetic profile and include screening for Warmblood Fragile Foal Syndrome (WFFS). The veterinarian must also verify the horse's identity to issue the official certificate of test results.

Rankings

Hannoveraner Verband do not use official ranking systems such as class or select/approved etc., as seen in Irish Sport Horse and the KWPN, instead the Hanoverian sport horse is judged on their performance testing scores and their competition results. Approved stallions mean the stallion has been licensed and fully completed its performance requirements and is entered into the Stallion Book; or the stallion is a World-Class Performance Stallion or Sire. A licensed stallion means the stallion has received its license from the AHS (American Hanoverian Society) or the HV (Hannoveraner Verband) - the AHS recognises the HV as the authority on bloodlines of the Hanoverian horse¹⁹.

Hanoverian sport horses have seen great success globally in dressage, show jumping, and eventing disciplines. In 2008, the Hanoverian stallion Weltmeyer was the world's number three sire of all World Breeding Federation for Sport Horses (WBFSH) dressage horses. The WBFSH and the FEI have consistently ranked the Hanoverian Society studbooks in the top for most successful studbooks in international show-jumping competitions. The WBFSH also ranked the Hanoverian studbook third for eventing horses in 2008, just behind the Irish Sport Horse and the Selle Français. In 2016, the Hanoverian studbook took the top position in the FEI/WBFSH studbook rankings for dressage. The current studbook rankings place the Hanoverian Studbook third in dressage, tenth in show jumping, and fifth in eventing.

5.3 France: Selle Français

The Selle Français is a French sport horse that is renowned for its excellence in show jumping, eventing, and dressage^{20, 21}. The Selle Français is known for its elegance, powerful impulsion, trainability, and eager-to-please disposition. The primary goals of the Selle Français breeding programme are to produce horses with exceptional jumping ability, strong and athletic conformation, intelligent and trainable temperaments, and soundness and longevity. To be registered in the ANSF (Association Nationale du Selle Français or the National Association of French Saddle Horses) a horse must be the offspring of two approved Selle Français parents. These goals are pursued through a structured selection process that is managed by the Association Nationale du Selle Français (ANSF) and involves several stages:

1. Registration and inspection process

Initial Registration Requirements

Before inspection, each horse must present proof of pedigree, a valid breeding certificate, a veterinary certificate of good health, and a completed marking sheet signed by a veterinarian. A mane or tail hair sample is collected for DNA testing, and all foals must have names beginning with the official letter for their birth year (for example, "A" for 2010, "B" for 2011, etc.).

DNA typing with parent verification is mandatory, although existing genetic marker reports may be accepted. Each application must receive pre-approval from the ANSF-US breeding committee, and while microchipping was initially optional, it has been mandatory since 2018.

To obtain initial registration, owners must submit the original ANSF or ANSF-US registration papers and complete all listed procedures. Horses that are not already registered Selle Français may still be considered; their pedigrees, performance records, and offspring quality are evaluated case by case by the ANSF-US breeding committee to determine eligibility.

2. Inspection and Approval

Stallions

Stallions are evaluated under stricter and more detailed standards than mares/geldings, focusing on type, gaits, performance, pedigree, and health. Stallion selection begins at the age of two in qualifying shows held in Autumn and Winter. Young stallions must participate in 'Testing' at the end of their third year in order to confirm their 'approval'. Selection continues through a series of more qualifying shows and then a final 10-day evaluation period²².

¹⁹ BREEDING PROGRAM AND STUD BOOK REGULATIONS

²⁰ The Selle Français stallion database website: [Stallion Database - Selle Français](#)

²¹ Selle Français Breed Selection Program: [French Saddle Stud Book \(ANSF\)](#)

²² <https://etalonsf.fr/en/testing/>

During inspections, stallions are evaluated at the walk and trot on hard and soft ground, assessed for conformation, and observed 'at liberty' and in a jump chute. Stallions aged four and above must also perform under saddle. Those passing all phases receive approval for a seven-year term, after which they are re-evaluated.

Older stallions (15 years or more) or those unable to perform due to injury may be granted exemptions if they provide sufficient performance records and veterinary documentation.

To maintain approval, a stallion must produce a minimum of six premium offspring inspected by ANSF-US and six performance results in appropriate classes during the seven-year period. Stallions losing approval may appeal once per year, but foals conceived during an unapproved period are not eligible for full registration papers.

Mares

Mares are inspected and approved according to four primary criteria: type, gaits, performance, and pedigree. Evaluations may be conducted at official inspections or by review of documentation by the ANSF-US breeding committee.

- Mares already approved by the French ANSF are automatically entered into the main ANSF-US studbook.
- Non-Selle Français mares approved by other WBFSH-recognised registries can be entered into the Label Mare Book, provided their original inspection scores meet ANSF-US standards.
- If a mare from another registry does not meet these standards, she must undergo in-person inspection by an approved Selle Français judge. If she does not qualify for the Main or Label Book, she may still be accepted into the Auxiliary Book.

These inspections focus on conformation, athleticism, movement, and pedigree quality to ensure mares align with the Selle Français breed standard.

Committee Roles and Oversight

The ANSF-US Breeding Committee and Stallion Approval Committee are composed of ANSF-US directors and representatives from the French ANSF. These committees may also consult independent experts. Their missions include improving breed genetics, updating regulations, validating breeding programs, approving or revoking breeding rights, and maintaining the integrity of all ANSF-US studbooks.

Both committees review all breeding books at least annually and coordinate decisions with the main ANSF organisation in France to ensure global alignment of standards for the Selle Français breed.

Rankings

The ANSF do not use official rankings, as seen in the ISH and the KWPN, for the Selle Français breed instead the ANSF uses a performance and progeny-based merit system for stallions. Stallions are evaluated and approved for breeding based on their conformation, movement, overall impression, and their competition performance records, those receiving a designation of 'Promising' or 'Very Promising' given at the end of testing can be officially approved as Selle Français stallions and are eligible for inclusion in the Young Stallion Guide²³. Very similar to the Hanoverian sport horse, the ANSF uses Entry-level ranking for stallions that are on provisional breeding status. Stallions can upgrade their ranking to Elite through performance achievements and producing quality offspring. The French Horse and Riding Institute and the Éperon Fund, however created a ranking system for the Selle Français stallions. The stallion rankings are classified by discipline, either jumping or eventing, and then broken down into groups based on their average age of jumping production and their number of offspring in jumping competitions²⁴. Stallions are then given an Average Index score of the top 25% of their offspring. From that Average Index score the stallions are then given a ranking from Class 1 to Class 4. For example, an eventing stallion can have a ranking of Group 1 and Class 2.

Selle Français have seen global success competing in many equestrian disciplines; however, they are primarily known for their great success in show jumping. As of September 2025, the WBFSH ranked the Selle Français as the best show jumping studbook in the world²⁵. The Selle Français have won numerous medals in the Summer Olympics and World Equestrian Games, including making up the entire gold-medal French team in show jumping at the 2002 World

²³ <https://etalonsf.fr/en/testing/>

²⁴ <https://database.etalonsf.fr/classement>

²⁵ <https://wbfs.com/studbook-rankings>

Equestrian Games and the 2004 Summer Olympics French eventing team was also composed of only Selle Français. The Selle Français breeds also place well in eventing with the studbook currently being ranked 6th in the world.

5.4 United Kingdom: Cleveland Bay

The Cleveland Bay was developed in Yorkshire, England and is the oldest established horse breed in England. The ancestors are believed to be the now-extinct 'Chapman Horse'. These horses were bred for strength, speed, soundness and stamina. Cleveland Bay stallions are often bred to Thoroughbred mares to produce "Sport Horses" – a horse with the best qualities of both breeds. The growing market for sport horses has contributed to the endangerment of this breed because the lighter and faster Cleveland Bay crossbreds had more value than the purebreds, so rather than breed pure Cleveland Bays, breeders crossbred their mares. The result is that it is now listed as being of 'Critical' status by the UK's Rare Breeds Survival Trust and is classified as endangered-maintained on the Food and Agriculture Organisation's (FAO) World Watch List for Domestic Animal Diversity²⁶.

The Cleveland Bay Horse Society (CBHS)²⁷ maintains several official registers for recording and protecting the breed: the Pure-Bred Studbook, the Part Bred Register, and an Overseas Register, while also acting as a DEFRA-recognised Passport Issuing Office for non-Cleveland Bay horses. The Pure-Bred Studbook (Green Passport) is divided into four sections: the UK Studbook, the Overseas Register, the Grading Register, and Section X. The UK and Overseas Studbooks record horses of proven pure Cleveland Bay pedigree, verified by DNA testing using the ISAG (International Society for Animal Genetics) panel. Sires must hold a current CBHS breeding licence, and all registrations require a covering certificate, completed veterinary identification chart, and applicable fees. The Grading Register records mares of at least 75% Cleveland Bay blood that have passed CBHS inspection and veterinary examination. Section X is reserved for foals from registered but unlicensed sires, which may transfer to the main studbook once the sire becomes licensed.

The Part Bred Register (Maroon Passport) records animals with a minimum of 12.5% Cleveland Bay blood - equivalent to at least one great-grandparent in the pure studbook. DNA testing is recommended and required for fillies that may be eligible for grading up. Several passport types are available, depending on whether DNA parentage is verified. The CBHS also offers an overstamping service for horses registered with other PIOs, provided the Cleveland Bay ancestry can be confirmed, sometimes through DNA comparison.

Stallion licensing ensures the quality and integrity of breeding stock. Three types of licence are issued: the Basic Licence, confirming breeding soundness after veterinary inspection; the Breed Quality Approved (QA) Licence, granted for life after successful inspection and approval by the Breed Committee and Council; and the Part Bred Licence, for registered part bred stallions whose progeny qualify only for the Part Bred Register. Stallions must be DNA profiled, and all covering certificates can only be issued and used for CBHS-licensed stallions. All assessments are carried out on movement, conformation, type and performance. Fraud or misuse results in expulsion from the Society.

The Grading Registers provide a structured pathway for mares and their progeny to progress toward full studbook status. Only mares are eligible for grading, beginning at Grade C, which requires a minimum age of three years, a height of at least 16 hands, at least 8½ inches of bone, and correct Cleveland Bay colour - bay with black points and only a small star permitted. Grade C mares must be of at least 75% Cleveland Bay blood, have a traceable pedigree, and pass both veterinary and Society inspections for type and soundness. Their female progeny by a licensed purebred stallion progress automatically to Grade B, and subsequent generations advance to Grade A, eventually becoming eligible for inspection into the full Studbook. Male offspring from graded mares are entered into the Grade D Register and, if entire, may only receive a Part Bred Stallion Licence. All applications require the breeder's and owner's signatures and the appropriate fees.

Across all registers, the CBHS enforces strict breed standards - particularly in pedigree verification, colour and conformation rules, and inspection procedures - to ensure the preservation and authenticity of the Cleveland Bay horse.

²⁶ FAO World Watch List for Genetic Animal Diversity

²⁷ The Cleveland Bay Horse Society

5.5 Comparison and Influence

The length and structure of stallion assessments vary significantly between HSI, CPBS and KBPCS and the other comparable European studbooks. The HSI, CPBS and KBPCS studbooks operate with a more flexible, cost effective and performance-based system than the European studbooks, where stallions may gain full approval over several years based on extended performance tests, competition results and progeny quality rather than fixed-duration testing. They also offer shorter assessment programs and do not require horses to be boarded overnight to participate in the evaluation process. In contrast, the KWPN employs a highly structured five-step process, including a 21-day performance test with mandatory boarding and an offspring inspection phase, typically achieving full approval within two to four years. The Hanoverian studbook follows a standardised approach, requiring stallion licensing and up to a 50-day performance test, involving required boarding at a testing facility. Stallions usually gain full approval within two to three years. The Selle Français, however, follows a more flexible and competition-based model, with stallions gaining provisional approval and being evaluated over time based on their performance or that of their offspring, sometimes taking up to seven years to achieve full breeding approval.

The studbooks of HSI and KWPN (Netherlands) share core similarities in structure and purpose. All utilise a tiered classification model for stallion approval, beginning with provisional entry and advancing to full breeding approval based on conformation, performance testing, and progeny quality. The Irish Draught Class 1–3 system is similar to the KWPN's multi-step approval with predicate titles, the Hanoverian's Stallion Book divisions, and the Selle Français' progression from provisional to full approval. Where Irish Draught Studbook distinguishes itself is through its bronze, silver, and gold merit awards across five disciplines, offering transparent recognition of achievement. The predicate system of the KWPN and the offspring performance-based Class 1–4 ratings of the Selle Français breed are equivalent to the 1-5 star rating system of the ISH.

Similarly, the studbook inspections of the rare breeds – the Cleveland Bay, the Kerry Bog Pony, and the Irish Draught all focus on the conservation of the bloodline. However, only the Irish Draught includes additional merits of Gold, Silver and Bronze for sport performance in dressage, eventing, jumping, driving/endurance and showing criteria.

HSI's system appears to draw influence from these well recognised studbooks. The Dutch KWPN's structured performance testing and predicate rankings closely align with HSI's star ratings for ISH and discipline-specific focus. Meanwhile, the Selle Français system's reliance on indexed offspring performance strongly parallels HSI's use of progeny results for both stallion classification and merit upgrades. Together, these influences reflect an effort by HSI to integrate international best practices while tailoring its system to the performance standards and breeding goals unique to Irish Sport Horses.

Comparison of costs

For comparison purposes, the table below presents the costs of foal passports and the inspection of stallions and mares for the sport horse breeds listed above. As fees can vary and may include additional charges or clauses, an estimated minimum and maximum cost range is shown. For more detailed information on further expenses - such as foal registration or additional sporting and medical evaluations - please refer to the breed-specific links provided in the footnotes.

Table 2 Fee comparison between studbooks **

Breed	Cost of foal passport	Cost of stallion inspection/licensing	Cost of mare inspection/licensing
KWPN²⁸	€190 - €383	€350 - €6,000	€94 - €162 (excludes performance tests)
Hannoverian²⁹	€95 + additional fees - €200	€200 - €750	€45 - €90
Selle Français^{30, 31}	€95 - €285	€450 - €1,200 (plus additional covering fees)	€145 - €430 (for breeding authorisation only)
ISH	€155 - €245	€250 - €900	€85 - €120
CPBS³²	€110 - €245	€400 - €600	€100 - €200

Several studbooks have additional membership fee structure, and in some cases annual fees for covering stallions to maintain license in the studbook(s).

** The information presented has been compiled from publicly available sources. While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, ifac and HSI accept no liability for any errors, omissions, or discrepancies.



28 Services

29 https://www.hannoveraner.com/app/uploads/downloads/pdf/Stutbuch/Hannoveraner_Verband_schedule_of_fees_2025.pdf

30 <https://www.selle-francais.fr/downloader.php?url=data%2Fdocuments%2F6115&filename=Tarifs+025.pdf&type=application%2Fpdf&view=1>

31 <https://etalonsf.fr/demande-dapprobation/>

32 <https://cpbs.ie/site/uploads/Mikes%20Uploads/2025%20Price%20List.pdf>

6

Key Findings and Recommendations



This section brings together the key findings and recommendations from across the review. While there is some overlap between areas, this consolidation helps prioritise actions that deliver the most value across multiple objectives. Implementing these recommendations has the potential to significantly improve the viability, effectiveness, and transparency of the HSI, CPBS and KBPCS inspection systems. The highest priority actions identified include;

- 1. Addressing concerns around bias and subjectivity in inspections** by introducing greater oversight - such as involving third-party or international inspectors.
- 2. Improving communication** is also critical. This includes digitising inspection reports and results, enhancing website usability to ensure information is clear and accessible, and increasing the use of social media for updates. These steps are strongly supported by stakeholder feedback, with 78% of survey respondents expressing interest in accessing digital records for inspected horses.
- 3. Improve education** and awareness of scoring criteria by developing and publishing easy to understand scoring rubrics for each trait, conformation, movement, athleticism with clear definitions and visual examples to guide both inspectors and breeders. This helps ensure consistency in how traits are evaluated.

Together, these actions would build greater trust in the system, improve accessibility for breeders and owners.

6.1. Common findings and recommendations

Table 3 Common Key Findings and Recommendations

Common Findings	Recommendations
<p>Variation in inspection requirements by breed: Some studbooks use full linear scoring, genetic and performance tests; others rely on visual appraisal only.</p>	Develop a minimum inspection standard across all studbooks, while retaining breed-specific traits.
<p>Disparity in veterinary requirements: Advanced tests (x-rays, endoscopy) applied in ID/ISH but not in others.</p>	Standardise core veterinary checks for stallions across all breeds.
<p>Use of linear profiling: Applied in ISH but not in Cob or KBP inspections.</p>	Consider the roll out of linear profiling to all studbooks with comprehensive training of inspectors.
<p>Transparency & communication gaps: Breeders report delays, unclear scoring, and limited appeals pathways. <i>(Audit Finding)</i></p>	Publish inspection data and clear scoring thresholds; provide breeders with standardised feedback reports with a clear timeframe to manage expectations of owners and breeders.
<p>Inspector subjectivity & bias risks: Over-reliance on panel consensus; risk of dominant inspectors influencing others. <i>(Audit Finding)</i></p>	Require independent scoring before discussion; introduce mock inspections to test consistency. Potential to introduce an independent inspector as added oversight and governance.
<p>Panel structure & conflict of interest risks: Small vet/inspector pool, with potential overlap between professional practice and inspections. <i>(Audit Finding)</i></p>	Expand and rotate vet and inspector panels; all studbooks should require conflict-of-interest declarations; HSI consider appointing a full-time independent vet.
<p>Accessibility concerns: Limited venues and midweek scheduling; high prep costs for smaller breeders.</p>	Expand inspection dates/venues/timings regionally; publish venue facility details in advance.

Common Findings	Recommendations
<p>Digital access & education gaps: Lack of online resources; limited breeder understanding of linear profiling.</p>	<p>Add a clear graphic of inspection process on HSI website (this report recognises the HSI website user interface has improved during the course of writing this review); restore supporting PDFs; create educational videos/guides; livestream or record inspections where feasible.</p>
<p>Genetic diversity & breed standards: Concerns about type drift in rare breeds such as IDH; concern about overuse of certain sires.</p>	<p>Strengthen focus on genetic diversity in selection; review breed standards regularly with breeder input.</p>

6.2. Breed-specific findings and recommendations

Table 4 Breed-Specific Key Findings and recommendations

Breed-Specific Findings	Recommendations
<p>Irish Draught Horse (IDH): Rigorous stallion inspections with extensive conformation, movement, and veterinary checks.</p>	<p>Maintain high standards but improve transparency by publishing scoring criteria and inspection outcomes.</p> <p>Recommend inspectors mark independently before panel discussion. Rotate panels to reduce bias. Use imagery to explain linear profiling, with anonymised photos illustrating good and poor examples of each trait.</p> <p>Add clearer pricing information for inspections to HSI website.</p> <p>Review the inspector training scoring thresholds compared to the other HSI training scoring levels. (e.g. variation between ISH and ID training scores).</p>
<p>Irish Sport Horse (ISH): Uses linear profiling and performance tests; stallions subject to advanced vetting. (Audit Finding)</p>	<p>Maintain high standards but improve transparency by publishing scoring criteria and inspection outcomes.</p> <p>Recommend inspectors mark independently before panel discussion. Rotate panels to reduce bias. Use imagery to explain linear profiling, with anonymised photos illustrating good and poor examples of each trait.</p> <p>Add clearer pricing information for inspections to HSI website.</p>
<p>Irish Sport Pony (ISP): Assessment includes conformation, movement, optional performance testing; no x-rays required for pony stallions.</p>	<p>Maintain high standards but improve transparency by publishing scoring criteria and inspection outcomes.</p> <p>Recommend inspectors mark independently before panel discussion. Rotate panels to reduce bias. Use imagery to explain linear profiling, with anonymised photos illustrating good and poor examples of each trait.</p> <p>Add clearer pricing information for inspections to HSI website.</p>
<p>Irish Cob & Part-Bred Cob: Inspections focus on visual traits and soundness; 16-trait scoring sheet used, but no linear profiling or performance test.</p>	<p>Explore the introduction of structured linear profiling to increase objectivity; provide clearer feedback to breeders.</p> <p>Add clearer pricing information for inspections to HSI website.</p>

Breed-Specific Findings	Recommendations
<p>Kerry Bog Pony (KBP): Simplest inspection system; stallions and mares assessed only on health, conformation, and movement, no performance criteria.</p>	<p>Strengthen transparency with published inspection guidelines and results; consider gradual introduction of linear scoring.</p>
<p>Connemara Pony: Operates independently under CPBS; some inspection standards are out of date in the studbook.</p>	<p>Update the CPBS studbook (e.g. with the correct linear scoring). Remove the mention of merit systems if not in use.</p>



Appendix A

Current Studbook Inspection Process in Ireland – Summary Tables

Table 5 Summary table of gaps in process

Category	Subsection	Irish Draught Horse		Irish Sport Horse (incl. TIH)		Irish Cob/Part-bred Cob		Kerry Bog Pony		Irish Sport Pony		Connemara Pony	
		Stallion	Mare/Gelding	Stallion	Mare/Gelding	Stallion	Mare/Gelding	Stallion	Mare/Gelding	Stallion	Mare/Gelding	Stallion	Mare/Gelding
Vet Examination	Clinical vet exam	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Endoscopic exam	X		X						X			
	Soundness trot-up	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Measured	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	EIA, EVA, CEM and FFS testing	X		X						X			
Pedigree Assessment	HWSD testing											X	X
	Performed day of or before by vet	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Based on bloodlines and the performance of those bloodlines			X	X					X	X	X	X
Conformation Assessment	Based on sire & dam lines, genetic diversity measures	X	X					X	X			X	X
	Linear scoring profile	X	X	X	X					X	X	X	X

Table 5 Summary table of gaps in process – continued

	Irish Draught Horse	Irish Sport Horse (incl. TIH)	Irish Cob/Part-bred Cob	Kerry Bog Pony	Irish Sport Pony	Connemara Pony
Gait Assessment	In-hand walk and trot	X	X	X	X	X
	Walk and trot on a hard surface	X	X	As part of the vet check	X	X
	Free gait in jumping pen	X	X		X	X
Ridden Assessment	Loose jump in a jumping pen	X	Optional		X	Optional
	Indoor arena walk, trot, and canter under saddle	X	X		X	
	Athleticism and jumping tested under saddle	X	X		X	
Beam Scores	Movement (walk/trot)	X	X	X	X	X
	Athleticism	X	X		X	X

The following tables refer to breeders who have completed inspections between 2023 and 2025. The population surveyed represents 60%, 57%, 8%, 96% and 16% of HSI Breeds (ID, ISH, ISP, Cobs, TIH), and 23% Connemara Pony Breeders respectively.

Table 6 Breeders completing inspections 2023 - 2025

Breeder	Irish Draught Breeders	Irish Sport Horse Breeders	Connemara Pony Breeders	TIH Breeders	Irish Sport Pony Breeders	Cob Breeders
Population Surveyed	232	218	154	60	29	22
Total Active Population between 2023-2025	385	385	672	385	385	23
Represented Proportion of Surveyed Population %	60%	57%	23%	16%	8%	96%
Completed Studbook Inspections	93%	85%*	95%		17%	73%
Inspected Mares	63%	62%	53%		3%	41%
Inspected Stallions	7%	5%	3%			9%
Both	23%	18%	40%		14%	23%

*Includes TIH horses



Table 7 Benefits of inspections as identified in survey

	Question	Irish Draught Breeders	Irish Sport Horse Breeders	Connemara Pony Breeders	TIH Breeders	Irish Sport Pony Breeders	Cob Breeders
Benefits	It provides a clear indication of my horse's health and veterinary soundness to prospective breeders/buyers	58%	56%	48%	43%	41%	59%
	I use the inspection results to market my horse to potential breeders/buyers	63%	53%	60%	55%	66%	68%
	The results help me better understand my horse's traits and ability	42%	44%	43%	32%	38%	32%
	I use the linear profile to assess my mare against potential stallions	47%	45%	43%	38%	24%	27%
	The classification adds financial value to my horse	66%	53%	71%	57%	66%	73%
	It allows me to enter the studbook relevant to my breeding goals	63%	62%	71%	60%	69%	73%
	I value the inspector panel's perspective on my horse/pony	10%	8%	3%	0%	10%	0%
	Allows me to enter certain competitions	50%	51%	51%	45%	62%	45%
	Allows me to avail of certain grants	35%	55%	36%	45%	62%	27%
	I use the published genetic information in my breeding programme (FFS/HWSD carrier status)	26%	29%	47%	20%	34%	32%

Table 8 Challenges of inspections as identified in survey

Challenges	Question	Irish Draught Breeders	Irish Sport Horse Breeders	Connemara Pony Breeders	TIH Breeders	Irish Sport Pony Breeders	Cob Breeders
	I do not understand how to use the linear profile	17%	18%	21%	13%	24%	32%
	I do not understand how the animals are scored or why they receive specific scores	23%	17%	18%	15%	21%	14%
	I am concerned that an inspection result will negatively impact my horse's value	38%	24%	35%	30%	28%	27%
	I am concerned that an inspection result will negatively impact my breeding programme	23%	13%	26%	10%	31%	32%
	I do not value the inspectors' opinions on my horse	6%	4%	2%	0%	0%	0%
	I do not like that inspectors score horses collectively rather than individually	33%	29%	30%	32%	31%	23%
	I think the veterinary assessment is too strict	5%	4%	3%	2%	10%	0%
	I do not think the veterinary assessment is thorough or strict enough	11%	13%	15%	17%	3%	18%
	I believe the inspection process is biased	13%	7%	4%	0%	3%	0%
	I have concerns about fairness in the inspection process	47%	34%	43%	45%	38%	36%
I believe the inspection process is too subjective (i.e. opinion based)	49%	43%	48%	57%	52%	55%	

Table 9 Inspections Survey Responses

	Breeder Pop.	% of ID Breeder	% of ISH Breeder	% of CP Breeder	% of ISH-TIH Breeder	% of ISP Breeder	% of IRC/ICP Breeder	% of KP Breeder
How would you rate your overall experience with the inspection process?								
Very negative	6%	9%	3%	5%	7%	3%	0%	0%
Somewhat negative	11%	12%	9%	11%	13%	17%	18%	0%
Neutral	24%	25%	27%	22%	25%	17%	36%	50%
Somewhat positive	31%	32%	32%	38%	32%	42%	23%	50%
Very positive	27%	22%	29%	23%	23%	21%	23%	0%
(blank)	1%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Do you feel you have enough information in advance to prepare for an inspection?								
1. Strongly disagree	9%	10%	8%	11%	8%	3%	9%	0%
2. Disagree	6%	6%	3%	3%	3%	3%	14%	0%
3. Neutral	28%	30%	28%	26%	33%	21%	14%	50%
4. Agree	12%	12%	15%	12%	17%	28%	5%	33%
5. Strongly agree	44%	41%	45%	48%	39%	45%	58%	17%
(blank)	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
I believe the inspection panel provides clear and constructive feedback.								
1. Strongly disagree	10%	11%	9%	11%	7%	10%	5%	0%
2. Disagree	21%	22%	16%	21%	25%	21%	27%	17%
3. Neutral	25%	25%	23%	28%	23%	21%	23%	66%
4. Agree	32%	29%	41%	28%	37%	38%	31%	17%
5. Strongly agree	11%	13%	11%	10%	8%	10%	14%	0%
(blank)	1%	0%	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%
I believe that the process of scoring and classification is transparent.								
1. Strongly disagree	11%	13%	7%	15%	8%	21%	14%	0%
2. Disagree	20%	23%	17%	16%	32%	21%	18%	33%
3. Neutral	27%	27%	31%	24%	30%	17%	31%	50%
4. Agree	29%	24%	32%	32%	22%	27%	23%	17%
5. Strongly agree	12%	13%	12%	12%	8%	14%	14%	0%
(blank)	1%	0%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%

	Breeder Pop.	% of ID Breeder	% of ISH Breeder	% of CP Breeder	% of ISH-TIH Breeder	% of ISP Breeder	% of IRC/ICP Breeder	% of KP Breeder
I understand how my score is achieved.								
1. Strongly disagree	3%	4%	1%	2%	5%	3%	14%	0%
2. Disagree	15%	14%	14%	14%	22%	14%	27%	50%
3. Neutral	23%	23%	26%	18%	23%	32%	5%	0%
4. Agree	31%	27%	33%	39%	38%	31%	40%	50%
5. Strongly agree	14%	10%	11%	19%	12%	3%	14%	0%
(blank)	14%	22%	15%	8%	0%	17%	0%	0%
I value the inspector panel's perspective on my horse/pony.								
1. Strongly disagree	6%	6%	5%	8%	7%	7%	5%	0%
2. Disagree	12%	11%	11%	14%	17%	14%	5%	0%
3. Neutral	24%	18%	26%	26%	36%	34%	32%	67%
4. Agree	30%	33%	29%	29%	33%	21%	35%	33%
5. Strongly agree	14%	10%	14%	15%	7%	7%	23%	0%
(blank)	14%	22%	15%	8%	0%	17%	0%	0%
The current inspection system is impartial and free from bias.								
1. Strongly disagree	16%	20%	14%	16%	18%	14%	5%	0%
2. Disagree	23%	23%	18%	21%	32%	17%	23%	66%
3. Neutral	32%	35%	34%	35%	30%	38%	40%	17%
4. Agree	18%	13%	25%	18%	13%	21%	23%	17%
5. Strongly agree	9%	8%	8%	8%	7%	7%	9%	0%
(blank)	2%	1%	1%	2%	0%	3%	0%	0%
There is a need for increased oversight or third-party involvement in inspections.								
1. Strongly disagree	8%	8%	6%	11%	5%	7%	5%	0%
2. Disagree	15%	11%	17%	19%	15%	7%	9%	17%
3. Neutral	30%	34%	28%	26%	35%	14%	36%	33%
4. Agree	27%	26%	32%	21%	32%	48%	27%	33%
5. Strongly agree	19%	20%	17%	22%	13%	24%	23%	17%
(blank)	1%	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%

	Breeder Pop.	% of ID Breeder	% of ISH Breeder	% of CP Breeder	% of ISH-TIH Breeder	% of ISP Breeder	% of IRC/ICP Breeder	% of KP Breeder
I believe that greater emphasis should be placed on pony height for pony studbook classification.								
1. Significantly less emphasis	2%	3%	1%	3%	0%	3%	5%	0%
2. Less emphasis	6%	5%	6%	6%	3%	7%	5%	0%
3. Stay the same	48%	49%	47%	38%	54%	48%	31%	50%
4. Greater emphasis	26%	29%	29%	31%	33%	28%	23%	17%
5. Significantly greater emphasis	12%	8%	11%	20%	10%	14%	27%	33%
(blank)	6%	6%	6%	2%	0%	0%	9%	0%
I believe that greater emphasis should be placed on genetic diversity of the mare/stallion for Class 1/ Preliminary Approval/Approval classification.								
1. Significantly less emphasis	1%	0%	1%	1%	0%	0%	5%	0%
2. Less emphasis	5%	6%	4%	4%	5%	7%	9%	0%
3. Stay the same	38%	37%	44%	34%	38%	41%	32%	17%
4. Greater emphasis	40%	40%	39%	40%	42%	45%	27%	17%
5. Significantly greater emphasis	15%	17%	11%	20%	15%	7%	27%	66%
(blank)	1%	0%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%
I believe that there should be ongoing review of stallion classification status (as he matures/has progeny).								
1. Strongly disagree	5%	6%	4%	8%	2%	7%	0%	0%
2. Disagree	9%	15%	9%	13%	8%	10%	6%	17%
3. Neutral	16%	16%	12%	19%	23%	21%	24%	33%
4. Agree	44%	40%	47%	38%	54%	45%	28%	33%
5. Strongly agree	25%	23%	28%	21%	13%	17%	42%	17%
(blank)	1%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%

	Breeder Pop.	% of ID Breeder	% of ISH Breeder	% of CP Breeder	% of ISH-TIH Breeder	% of ISP Breeder	% of IRC/ICP Breeder	% of KP Breeder
I believe that greater emphasis should be placed on veterinary assessment for Class 1/Preliminary Approval/Approval classification.								
1. Significantly less emphasis	2%	2%	2%	1%	2%	0%	0%	0%
2. Less emphasis	7%	10%	6%	5%	5%	14%	0%	0%
3. Stay the same	58%	57%	58%	63%	68%	51%	45%	50%
4. Greater emphasis	24%	23%	26%	18%	22%	28%	41%	33%
5. Significantly greater emphasis	8%	7%	7%	12%	3%	7%	14%	17%
(blank)	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%
I believe that greater emphasis should be placed on age-appropriate competition performance for Class 1/Preliminary Approval/Approval classification.								
1. Significantly less emphasis	2%	2%	1%	1%	2%	0%	0%	0%
2. Less emphasis	8%	10%	12%	3%	12%	10%	4%	0%
3. Stay the same	44%	49%	38%	51%	46%	41%	55%	50%
4. Greater emphasis	33%	28%	38%	31%	37%	28%	23%	17%
5. Significantly greater emphasis	11%	10%	10%	12%	3%	21%	14%	33%
(blank)	2%	1%	1%	2%	0%	0%	4%	0%
I believe that greater emphasis should be placed on judging through linear profiling for Class 1/Preliminary Approval/Approval classification.								
1. Significantly less emphasis	6%	9%	5%	8%	8%	14%	5%	0%
2. Less emphasis	12%	13%	13%	8%	12%	21%	5%	0%
3. Stay the same	56%	53%	61%	52%	62%	41%	58%	67%
4. Greater emphasis	20%	20%	17%	25%	13%	21%	18%	33%
5. Significantly greater emphasis	4%	4%	3%	5%	5%	3%	9%	0%
(blank)	2%	1%	1%	2%	0%	0%	5%	0%



	Breeder Pop.	% of ID Breeder	% of ISH Breeder	% of CP Breeder	% of ISH-TIH Breeder	% of ISP Breeder	% of IRC/ICP Breeder	% of KP Breeder
I would like to see objective technology/tools used in inspection decisions for Class 1/Preliminary Approval/Approval classification.								
1. Strongly disagree	8%	10%	8%	10%	7%	7%	14%	0%
2. Disagree	16%	16%	17%	25%	20%	20%	18%	50%
3. Neutral	50%	50%	51%	40%	53%	52%	40%	33%
4. Agree	18%	17%	17%	18%	15%	14%	23%	17%
5. Strongly agree	6%	5%	5%	6%	5%	7%	5%	0%
(blank)	2%	2%	2%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%
I would like to see international judges included in the inspection panels for more impartiality.								
1. Strongly disagree	8%	12%	6%	13%	10%	7%	9%	17%
2. Disagree	13%	14%	12%	17%	13%	14%	9%	17%
3. Neutral	23%	23%	22%	21%	27%	24%	23%	17%
4. Agree	32%	32%	35%	27%	42%	31%	41%	32%
5. Strongly agree	23%	19%	25%	21%	8%	24%	18%	17%
(blank)	1%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%
I would like to see progeny classifications impact Class 1/Preliminary Approval/Approval classification.								
1. Strongly disagree	3%	5%	3%	6%	8%	3%	0%	17%
2. Disagree	11%	12%	11%	17%	8%	7%	9%	17%
3. Neutral	29%	31%	24%	27%	33%	24%	41%	0%
4. Agree	41%	35%	46%	35%	41%	45%	32%	66%
5. Strongly agree	15%	16%	16%	14%	10%	21%	18%	0%
(blank)	1%	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%
I believe that greater emphasis should be placed on progeny age-appropriate competition performance for classifications in Class 1/Preliminary Approval/Approval classification.								
1. Strongly disagree	3%	3%	2%	6%	5%	3%	0%	0%
2. Disagree	10%	11%	11%	14%	12%	10%	14%	0%
3. Neutral	40%	48%	35%	40%	39%	28%	40%	50%
4. Agree	34%	26%	38%	29%	37%	42%	27%	33%
5. Strongly agree	11%	9%	13%	10%	7%	17%	14%	17%
(blank)	2%	3%	1%	1%	0%	0%	5%	0%

	Breeder Pop.	% of ID Breeder	% of ISH Breeder	% of CP Breeder	% of ISH-TIH Breeder	% of ISP Breeder	% of IRC/ICP Breeder	% of KP Breeder
Would you like to see digital records and tracking for horses that have undergone inspections?								
1. Definitely not interested	1%	1%	0%	3%	2%	0%	0%	0%
2. Not interested	5%	5%	5%	9%	7%	7%	0%	0%
3. Neutral	16%	19%	17%	16%	17%	17%	15%	17%
4. Somewhat interested	38%	37%	37%	37%	44%	45%	19%	50%
5. Very interested	39%	38%	41%	34%	30%	31%	66%	33%
(blank)	1%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Would you support live-streamed or recorded inspections?								
1. Definitely would not support	5%	4%	4%	8%	2%	7%	9%	33%
2. Would not support	9%	7%	9%	11%	7%	7%	9%	17%
3. Neutral	17%	15%	17%	16%	20%	24%	23%	33%
4. Would support	36%	40%	38%	35%	43%	38%	32%	17%
5. Definitely would support	32%	34%	32%	29%	28%	24%	27%	0%
(blank)	1%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Appendix B

Daughter societies

The Irish Draught Horse Studbook has three filial studbooks whose breeding programmes follow the Studbook of Origin. These daughter societies are:

1. **Irish Draught Horse Society of Great Britain (IDHSGB):** Established in 1979, the IDHSGB is dedicated to the preservation, protection, and promotion of the Irish Draught breed in Great Britain. It operates as a Passport Issuing Organisation (PIO) for both pure and part-bred Irish Draughts.
2. **Irish Draught Horse Society of Canada (IDHSC):** Formed in 2002 and aligned with the Irish Draught Horse Studbook in 2012, the IDHSC registers and recognises purebred and partbred Irish Draught horses through a structured process of registration, selection, and performance recognition.
3. **Irish Draught Horse Society of North America (IDHSNA):** Established in 1993, the IDHSNA is a not-for-profit corporation dedicated to fostering an appreciation and understanding of the Irish Draught Horse and the Irish Draught Sport Horse in North America.

Horse Sport Ireland provides a list of inspectors to support these daughter societies during their inspections but does not have a direct role in their operations. Each daughter society must adhere to the studbook rules of the Studbook of Origin, but their approval and operation are managed by the competent authority in their respective countries. For instance, the IDHSGB is approved by DEFRA (UK Government).

Equine passporting regulations differ significantly between the USA and Canada, making the legal status of these operations unique to each country.

Additionally, the Connemara Pony Breeders Society (CPBS) and the Kerry Bog Pony Co-operative Society also have several daughter societies that operate under similar principles.

The Connemara Pony Breeders' Society is linked to seventeen affiliated daughter breeding societies and studbook authorities around the world (listed below). Together, these organisations make up the International Committee for Connemara Pony Societies (ICCPs), a voluntary body governed by its own independent constitution. The ICCPS meets annually in Ireland during the CPBS Connemara Pony Show in Clifden, County Galway, each August.

1. **Great Britain:** British Connemara Pony Society (BCPS)
2. **United States:** American Connemara Pony Society (ACPS)
3. **Canada:** Canadian Connemara Pony Society
4. **Australia:** Connemara Pony Breeders' Society of Australia
5. **New Zealand:** Connemara Pony Society of New Zealand
6. **France:** Association Française du Poney Connemara
7. **Germany:** Connemara Pony Vereinigung (German Connemara Pony Society)
8. **Netherlands:** Dutch Connemara Pony Breeders Society
9. **Sweden:** Swedish Connemara Pony Society
10. **Finland:** Finnish Connemara Pony Society
11. **Norway:** Norsk Ponnnavlsforening (Connemara section)
12. **Switzerland:** Swiss Connemara Pony Society
13. **South Africa:** Connemara Pony Society of Southern Africa
14. **Austria:** ÖZP – Sektion Connemara
15. **Belgium:** Belgian Connemara Pony Association (BCPA)/Connemara Pony Belgium (under BWP umbrella)
16. **Denmark:** Danish Connemara Pony Society (approved as a CPBS daughter society).
17. **Czech Republic:** Česká Asociace Connemara Pony (CACP)

The Kerry Bog Pony Co-operative Society also has a number of affiliated daughter societies overseas, each operating under similar principles to support and promote the breed at an international level.

- **Great Britain:** A British Kerry Bog Pony Society was formed as a daughter society to the Irish KBPCS (now KBP Co-operative)
- **United States:** American Kerry Bog Pony Society (AKBPS)
- **International umbrella (multi-country owners/registry support):** International Kerry Bog Pony Association (IKBPA), founded 2016.



Funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine under National Breeding Services



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