

Covid-19: Equestrian Business Impact Survey

Horse Sport Ireland, the Governing Body for Equestrian Sport in Ireland, has carried out an online survey to gauge the impact of Covid-19 on the Irish Equestrian sector. The survey ran from May 29th to June 15th and the results show that just like many other businesses, the Irish Equestrian Sector has been severely impacted by the Covid-19 crisis.

Horse Sport Ireland will use the results of this survey to understand how to best support the industry throughout this period and as part of discussions with relevant Government Departments.

Horse Sport Ireland wish to thank all those who contributed to the survey for their time in contributing to this important document.

Summary of survey results

Before Covid-19 restrictions came into place, over three quarters (83%) of Equestrian businesses had less than five members of staff, just over a quarter had between five and ten staff members, and less than 3% of respondents had more than 11 staff members. This supports the value of small businesses creating employment in the Equestrian sector as a contributor to the rural economy.

At the time of taking the survey, over half of businesses (57%) reported that they were continuing to trade but to a lesser extent, while over a third (39%) reported that they had temporarily closed or paused trading. Several different measures were put in place by businesses to cope with the impact of Covid-19 restrictions, the most common being laying off staff in the short term (almost half at 43%). With others decreasing working hours (28%). A small portion of businesses did not take any action, whilst others were reviewing and reducing costs, putting horses to pasture and not sending mares to stud.

With regard to the status of staff during the Covid-19 restrictions,

- 40% of businesses reported that more than 75% of staff remained in normal work
- 25% of businesses reported that more than 75% of staff were made redundant,
- 17% of businesses reported that over 75% of staff were furloughed
- 50% of businesses reported that no staff were made redundant
- 41% of businesses reported that no staff were furloughed.

75% of businesses expressed concerns they will not have finances available to continue trading, showing there is financial uncertainty and that support may be necessary throughout the industry.

Forty-five percent of respondents stated that their turnover had decreased by more than 75% due to Covid-19 restrictions and 95% of respondents experienced a decrease in turnover of some degree. The majority of businesses have a degree of confidence that they will be able to continue trading

once restrictions are lifted, while 18% have concerns about future trading conditions over the coming months.

When presented with a list of financial initiatives and supports available, over half (56%) of respondents stated they had not applied for any of the available initiatives. Of those who had applied for supports, the most popular were the National Covid-19 Income Support Scheme (30%), followed by the Rates Waiver (10%).

Of the applications for the National Covid-19 Income Support Scheme

- 90% had received the support.
- Over 30% of respondents who had applied were still awaiting a response on various applications at the time of completing the survey.

When asked what support methods from Horse Sport Ireland would be useful to respondents, the survey suggests that any supports would be gratefully received by the industry. The most popular suggestion was that of financial information and provision of Government support schemes (55%), closely followed by Promoting policies and initiatives to Government for restarting the industry (53%).

Other suggestions given by respondents included:

- Provision of prize funding.
- Support for Equestrian Support Services (e.g. Photographers, caterers, mobile tack shops).
- Help with insurance and affordable cover, a fodder grant or subsidies for general care.
- Recommencement of shows and their continuation throughout the rest of 2020.
- Providing guidelines for reopening equestrian activities.
- Covid-19 safety training.
- Support for sole traders who do not employ staff.

The majority (32%) of respondents to the survey are Breeders/Producers, a quarter are Riding Centres, 16% are Livery Yards and between 3% and 9% are Equestrian Support Services, Equestrian Competition Venues, Coaches, Schooling Venues or Other.

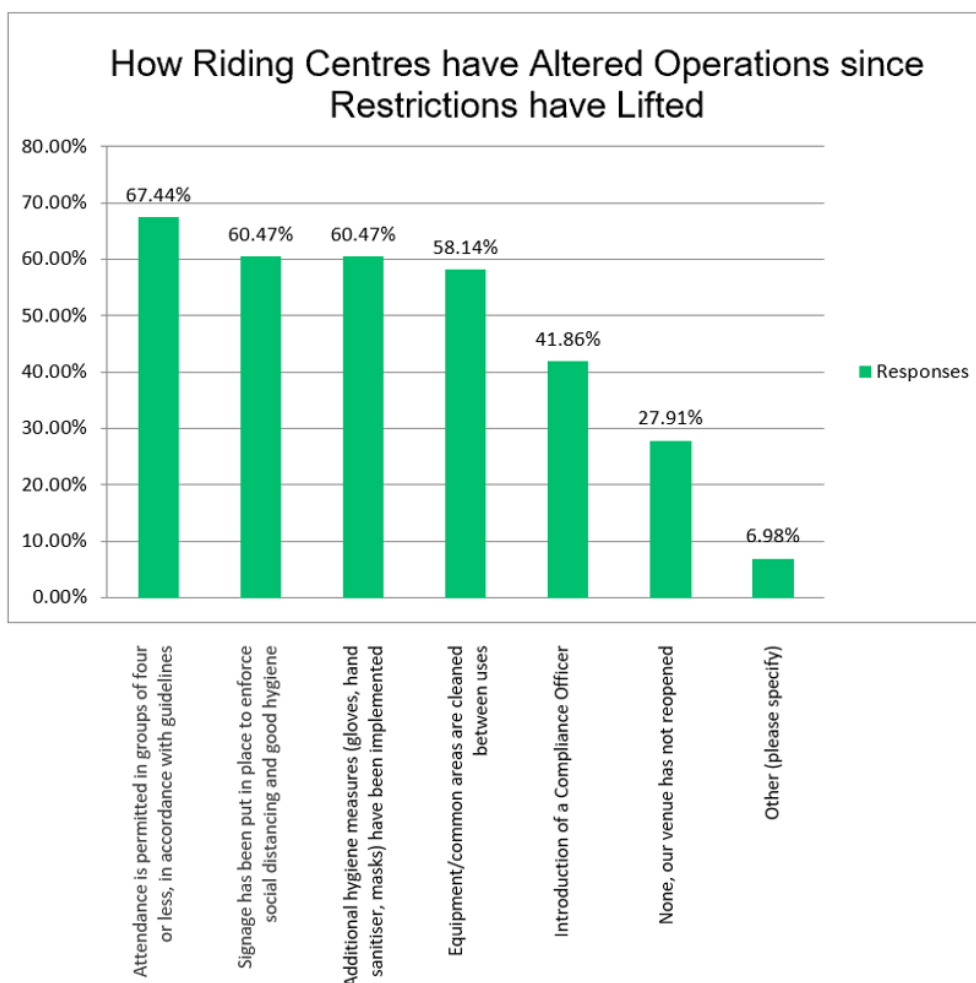
Coaching

All respondents stated that Covid-19 has impacted their business, with 60% reporting a reduction in turnover of more than 75%, with all others reporting a reduction between 26% and 75%. In open-ended questions, it was frequently reported that travel restrictions were a significant limitation for businesses, so it is likely that this had a significant impact on Coaching business.

Riding Centres

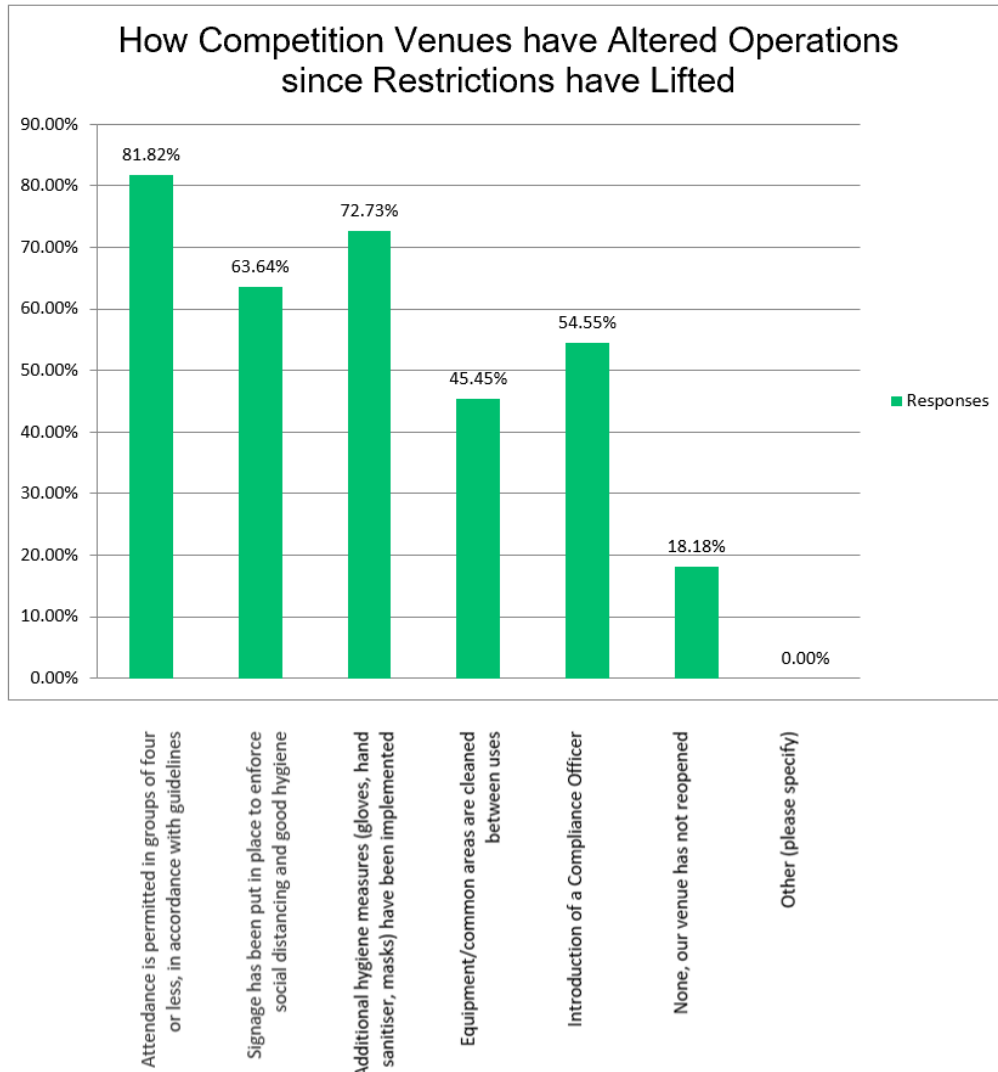
According to the survey, the vast majority (74%) of Riding Centres hold lessons more seven or more times per week, whether group or private lessons. The cost base in Riding Centres remained high during Covid-19 restrictions – 74% of venues continued to care for animals on-site, almost two thirds (63%) carried out grounds and facility maintenance, and close to half carried out admin duties (47%). Just over three quarters (77%) of respondents were not able to generate any alternative income during the Covid-19 restrictions. Of those who were, details included livery, selling stock, leasing out animals and selling feed.

The response from Riding Centres since reopening has demonstrated a high level of responsibility regarding Covid-19 – most selected that they have permitted attendance in groups of four or less in accordance with guidelines, while other responses included putting signage in place to encourage social distancing and hygiene measures, purchase of additional hygiene measures (gloves, hand sanitiser, masks) and cleaning equipment and common areas between uses. Just over a quarter of respondents (28%) had not reopened at the time of taking the survey.



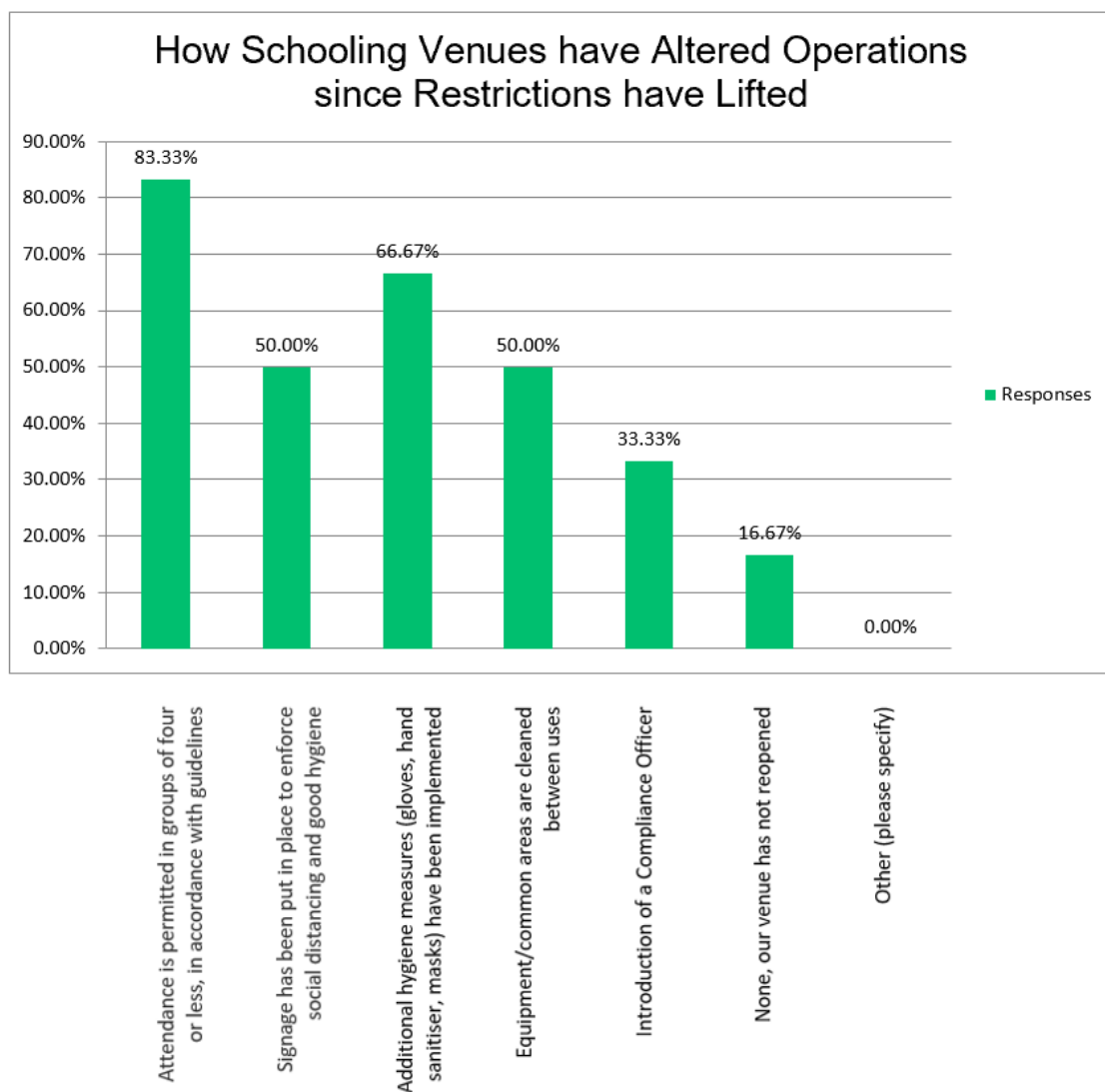
Competition Venues

Prior to Covid-19 restrictions, almost two thirds (64%) of Competition venues that responded said they held competitions between one and three times per week. Since Covid-19 restrictions have been in place, over half of venues (54%) ceased all operations while the remainder carried out grounds and facility maintenance, and admin duties. Almost three quarters (72%) of venues were not able to generate any additional income, and those that were did not give details. With the recent easing of restrictions, the vast majority (82%) reported that upon reopening they have altered operations to permit attendance in groups of four, as well as putting signage in place and implementing hygiene measures such as masks, gloves, hand sanitiser. Eighteen percent of venues remained closed at the time of taking the survey.



Schooling venues

Prior to Covid-19 restrictions, 84% of venues that responded were open seven or more times per week for go-as-you-please and/or advance booking schooling sessions. While restrictions were in place, half of venues reported ceasing all operations. A large majority (83%) were unable to generate any alternative income during the restrictions, and those that were reported that this income came from Liveries. With equestrian activities resuming, 83% of venues have restricted attendance to groups of four in accordance with guidelines, alongside other methods to reduce the spread of Covid-19. Seventeen percent remained closed at the time of taking the survey.



Breeding and Production

According to survey responses

- 58% of Breeding and Production businesses have less than six broodmares
- 23% have more than ten broodmares
- 33% of Breeding and Production businesses have more than ten youngstock in their care
- 20% of respondents have six stallions or fewer
- The majority, 79% do not have stallions.

A significant majority of Breeding and Production businesses who responded to the survey have more than 7 horses in their care which are to be produced for sale. These figures confirm the value of small-scale breeders to the Equestrian industry, and the importance of youngstock production to the rural economy.

While Covid-19 restrictions were in place, close to two thirds (61%) of Breeding and Production businesses reported being able to breed mares as normal, and 12% are confident that they will be able to breed mares as normal. A further 12% of Breeding and Production businesses stated that they were unable to breed as normal, with reasons including Vets only responding to emergency calls meaning scanning mares was not possible, and choosing not to breed because of uncertainties surrounding Covid-19 and Brexit and the impact these may have on future horse trade.

Most stallion owners reported that they have not been covering at the projected rate for 2020, one reason given was that coverings have only begun since June which is likely in line with recent lifting of travel restrictions. Regarding breeding and the production of young horses, the biggest factor impacting business was reported to be disruption of horse production due to cancelled shows (84%), while reduced sale of horses was another significant factor for 79% of businesses.

When asked about having resources to continue trading

- 44% of businesses reported that they have the resources to continue trading for between one and three months.
- 26% of businesses feel they will be able to continue trading for more than six months
- 14% of respondents have more immediate concerns around the viability of their business. In terms of equine welfare
- 79% of Breeding and Production businesses are confident that they will be able to ensure their horses' welfare can be adequately maintained over the coming months.
- 20% of respondents were unsure due to uncertainties surrounding Covid-19.

Livery Yards

Prior to Covid-19, more than two thirds (68%) of Livery Yards who responded to the survey had more than ten horses in their care.

Since Covid-19 restrictions have come into place

- 40% of Livery Yards reported that less than 25% of horses in their care were turned out to grass or left livery
- Over half of the yards reported that over half of horses had been turned out to grass or left livery
- 72% of yards have been able to facilitate owner access to yards with preventative measures in place while the remainder closed to the public
- Over half of Livery Yards reported missed payments for livery over the period when Covid-19 restrictions were in place.

Overall, more than half of livery horse owners intend to return to normal activities once restrictions allow, while others have not given much if any indication to Livery Yard owners of their plans. Costs incurred by Livery Yards throughout Covid-19 restrictions include implementation of working from home, purchase of cleaning supplies including gloves, hand sanitiser and face masks, and offering additional paid sick leave. Measures taken to improve biosecurity include implementing changes to routine (social distancing, cleaning regimes), enhancing cleaning and disinfection in the workplace and placing restrictions on in-person visits, travel and meetings, all of which are in line with Government guidelines.