



HORSE SPORT
IRELAND

The Business of Horsepower 2024: **Staffing the Equine Sector**



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National Breeding Services



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



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CEO Foreword

The sport horse sector employs an estimated 47,000 people directly & indirectly and is worth in excess of €1 billion to the Irish economy annually. This does not happen by chance and the international success by Irish riders, supported in Horse Sport Ireland high performance programmes and breeding and production initiatives funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, are an important avenue for breeders and producers to source markets for their horses.

In this year's report, our attention shifts towards the importance of people and skills within the equine sector. With Ireland facing record-high employment levels and recruitment challenges across almost every sector, prioritising investment in securing the future of our equine workforce is critical. This report highlights the positive strides being made by equine businesses in implementing formal employee processes as well as the range of attractive benefits being offered to retain staff.

Horse Sport Ireland will continue to support knowledge transfer initiatives for Irish breeders and the wider equine sector. Recently, we have initiated several projects aimed at enhancing the skills and knowledge base within the industry.



Engaging with external expertise is vital for our sector. It offers fresh insights into methods and processes proven effective in other farming domains and markets. Through collaboration with industry experts, there is an opportunity for Irish breeders to safeguard the future of their businesses, expand their enterprises, and reach wider markets.

The findings of this report highlight the opportunities that exist to enhance the Irish equine sector. Horse breeding, production and trading have deep roots in Ireland, but beyond tradition, they play a crucial role in the country's economy and reputation. Known globally for producing top-performing horses and quality bloodstock, this success is thanks to the hard work and expertise of Irish breeders, showcasing Ireland's commitment to excellence in the sport horse industry.

61% of respondents have sold horses internationally highlighting the global reach and demand for Irish horses. However, it must be acknowledged that external economic pressures such as inflation and rising land prices are putting pressure on horse owners. However, amidst these challenges, there are clear opportunities for growth and improvement within the sector.

It is clear from the survey results that business owners require tools to facilitate staff management. This presents an opportunity for learning and development within the sector. The initiatives of the Equine Employers Association in the UK showcase the kind of resources that Irish equine breeders and owners could benefit from. Offering an accessible contract creator and outlines of employee rights, this tool has assisted business owners in enhancing their practices to align with fundamental employment requirements.

At Horse Sport Ireland, our goal with this report is to offer valuable insights into the prevailing sentiment within the equine sector. We aim to highlight the necessary support that equine breeders require to promote sector growth, ultimately strengthening the sport horse industry's annual €1 billion contribution to the Irish economy.

“

Through collaboration with industry experts, there is an opportunity for Irish breeders to safeguard the future of their businesses, expand their enterprises, and reach wider markets.”

As highlighted in our previous report, one of my first priorities upon taking up the role of CEO at Horse Sport Ireland was to engage with Irish breeders and the broader equine sector to identify additional focus areas for our organisation. The inclusion of equine activities under the Targeted Agriculture Modernisation Scheme (TAMS) was a clear sector objective and its inclusion was a boost for the sector. Since then, numerous equine business owners have successfully secured grants under the scheme, as referenced in the report.

We extend our gratitude to all those who have contributed to this report, including survey respondents, those who provided case studies, the team at Horse Sport Ireland, and the Department of Agriculture, Food, and the Marine for supporting this undertaking.

Denis Duggan

Chief Executive | Horse Sport Ireland

Key Takeaways



International Market Presence

61%

have sold horses internationally. Key markets include Great Britain, the USA/Canada, and the EU, highlighting the global reach and demand for Irish horses.



Succession Planning

35%

of breeders have either selected a successor, have a possible successor, or are proactively pursuing other arrangements.



Employment Practices

48%

of businesses implementing formal employee processes.



Experience over Qualifications

82%

employers highly value practical experience, with 82% prioritising it over formal qualifications.



In-Demand Skills

- General maintenance
- Land and grass management
- Starting and schooling
- Communication and marketing
- General horsemanship/horse handling



Environmental Efforts

Improving hedgerows (64%) and tree planting (56%) are the key environmental initiatives being taken.



Top Challenges

- Increasing costs **78%**
- Finding high value markets **51%**
- Access to land **28%**



Employee Benefits

Equine businesses are offering a range of attractive benefits to retain staff including:

- Livery/stabling **53%**
- Coaching/mentoring **51%**
- Accommodation **43%**
- Off-season breaks **36%**
- Career training **35%**



Training and Development

The most beneficial training courses identified are:

- Land management **35%**
- Equine health **31%**
- Equine breeding and genetics **29%**



TAMS Participation

15%

of respondents have applied or are applying for the equine TAMS, with fencing being the number one application.

The Business

The business section provides insights into the key markets for Irish horses and the current sentiment of business owners operating in the sector as well as their perspective on succession planning, the environment, and details on the uptake of the equine TAMS scheme.

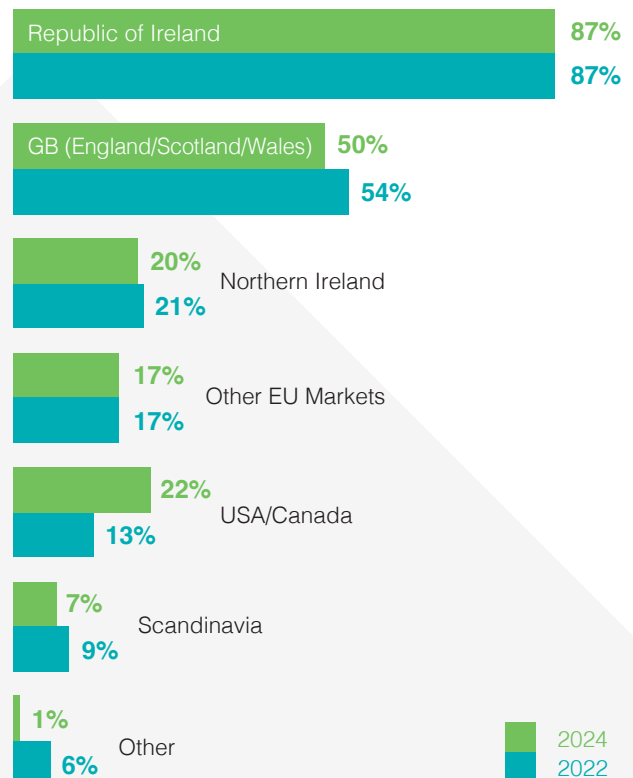


Irish Horse Sales / International Markets

Respondents to the survey acknowledge that Irish horse sales remain very strong. In the last three years 87% of respondents have sold horses in the Republic of Ireland. 20% have sold horses to Northern Ireland, while 61% have sold horses off the island with Great Britain (50%), USA / Canada (22%) and the EU (17%) being the most common destinations for Irish horses. Despite dropping 2 percentage points, Scandinavia remains an important market for Irish breeders as 7% have made sales to this region.

The results clearly highlight the importance of access to overseas markets, especially GB, but also demonstrate that the domestic market remains significant.

MARKETS SOLD (n=493)

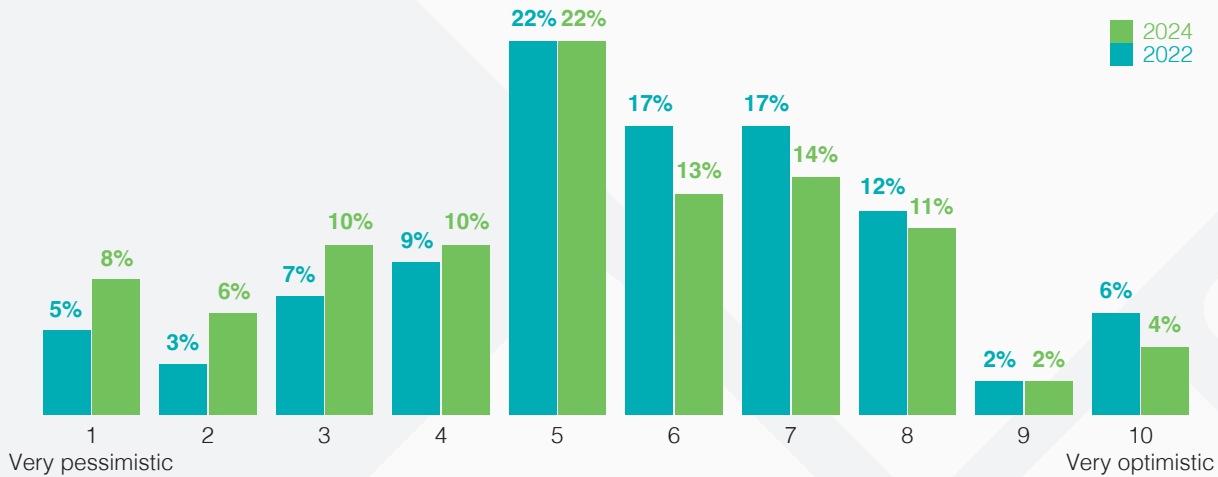


Sentiment and Prosperity

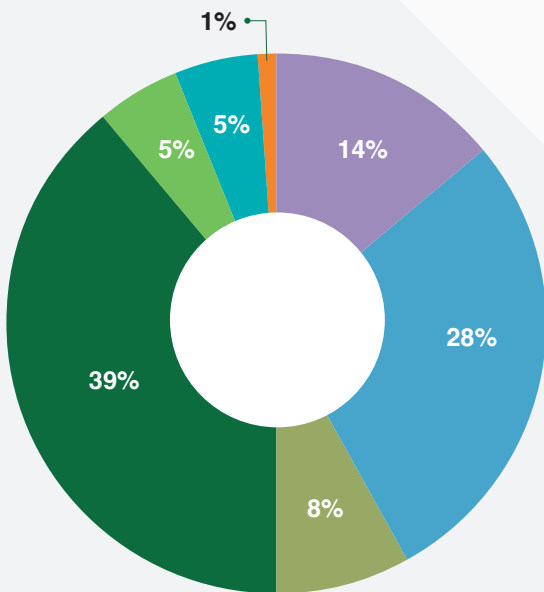
The sentiment of Irish breeders shifted in the year between surveys as 44% of respondents are somewhat or very optimistic about the future of their business compared to 54% in 2022. On the negative end of the spectrum 8% did not feel optimistic at all, while 22% were not sure.

This downturn in sentiment tallies with 50% of equine businesses estimating that they will see a decline in income. However, 11% of respondents are confident that they will see an increase in income compared to the previous year. 14% of businesses predict their income will decline by more than 50%.

OPTIMISM ABOUT THE BUSINESS 2024 VS 2022



EQUINE INCOME (n=503)



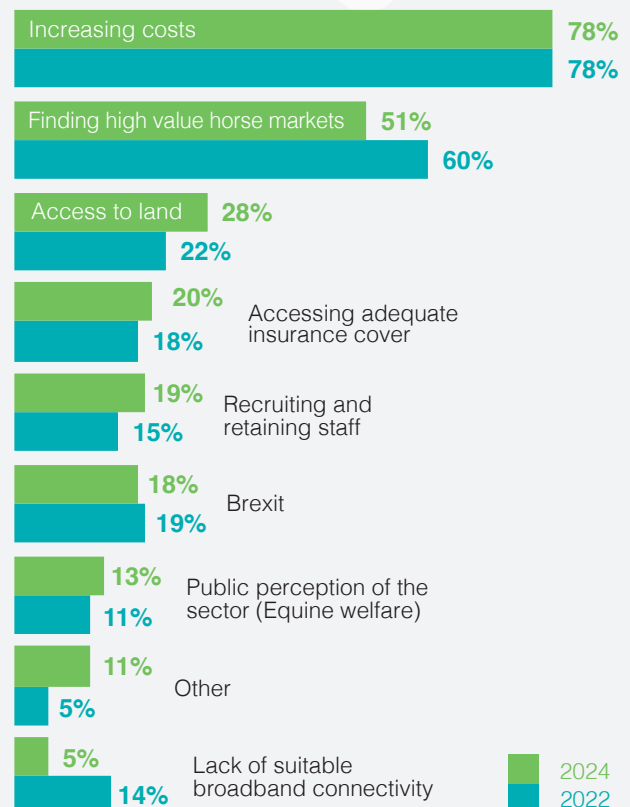
- Decline by more than 50%
- Decline by 11-50%
- Decline by less than 10%
- Stay the same
- Increase by less than 10%
- Increase by 11-50%
- Increase by more than 50%

Challenges

It is unsurprising that increasing costs were ranked again as the number one challenge facing equine businesses (78%).

The other headwinds facing the sector include finding high value markets for horses (51%), access to land (28%) and accessing adequate insurance cover (20%). Recruiting and retaining staff emerged from the data as a challenge, up 4 percentage points on the previous year. Access to land will continue to emerge as a challenge as land policy changes with solar farms, anaerobic digestion and a reducing nitrates derogation for livestock farmers, particularly dairy farmers, all ensuring the demand for land to lease or buy is highly competitive.

CHALLENGES FACING BREEDERS (n=501)





Succession in Equine businesses

- 65%** of breeders have not selected a successor
- 47%** blame the lack of viability of the sector
- 30%** think the lifestyle does not appeal to the next generation

Transferring the ownership of equine farming businesses to the successor generation is a process that takes time, effort and planning. It is not simply an event where assets are packaged up and handed over, but rather a slow transmission of knowledge, skills, management control and ownership. The challenging nature of succession planning unfortunately means that many fail to plan appropriately.

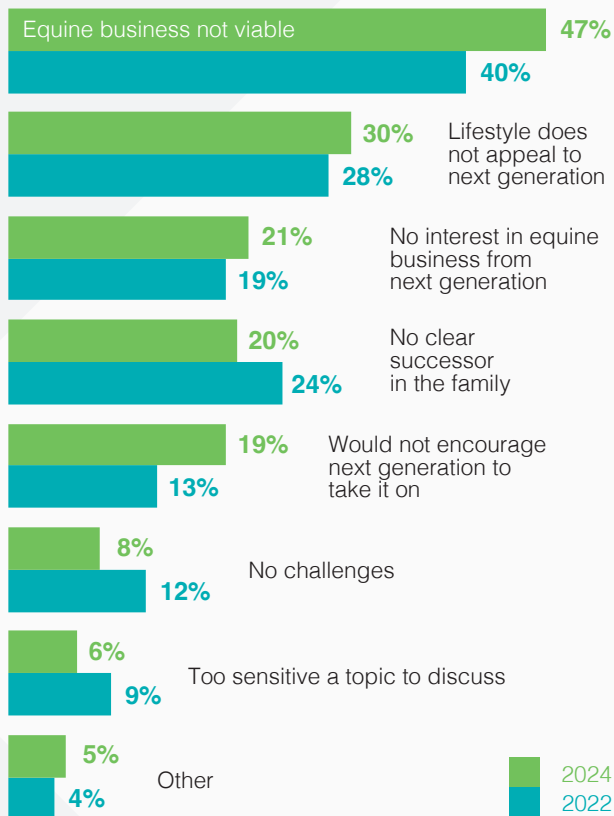
20% of respondents see no clear successor in their family, and 21% indicated that the next generation showed no interest in the equine business. Only 15% of respondents indicated that they have definitively identified a successor to their business. Encouragingly, 17% do have a possible successor but no final decision has been arrived at yet. 3% of respondents are pursuing other arrangements.

Succession planning is not an easy task even when a successor has been identified. Various hurdles exist and some of the respondents (8%) acknowledged that it is such a sensitive topic they cannot even bring it up. The top challenge to equine business owners in succession planning is the perceived lack of viability of the equine business (47%) and the lifestyle being unappealing to the next generation (30%). 19% would not encourage the next generation to take it on.

There is a need for a deeper examination of the factors affecting the sustainability and continuity of equine businesses in Ireland. Despite its significant contribution to the economy, particularly in rural areas, there are challenges that could undermine its future stability.

To sustain the Irish equine industry, addressing the perceived challenges of viability and lifestyle appeal will be important. In line with the evolving expectations of workers across all sectors, there's a growing demand for a higher quality of work life, which extends to the equine sector. Stakeholders recognise these shifting dynamics and will need support in responding to ensure the sector remains competitive and attractive to both current and prospective participants.

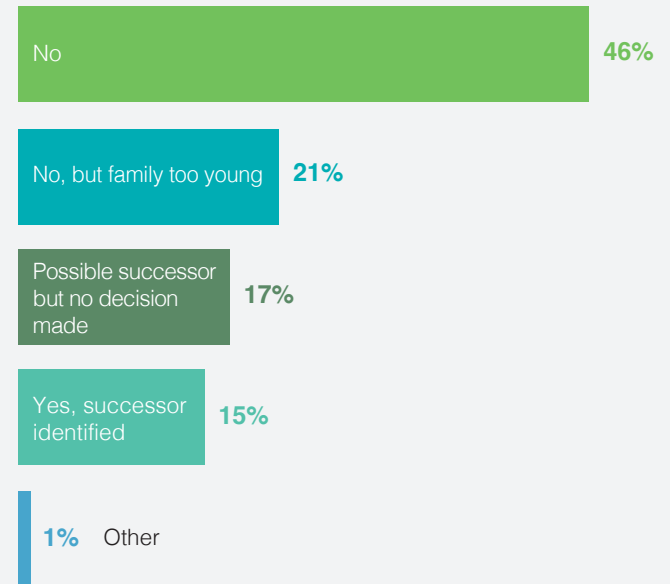
MAIN BARRIERS TO SUCCESSION PLANNING (n=496)

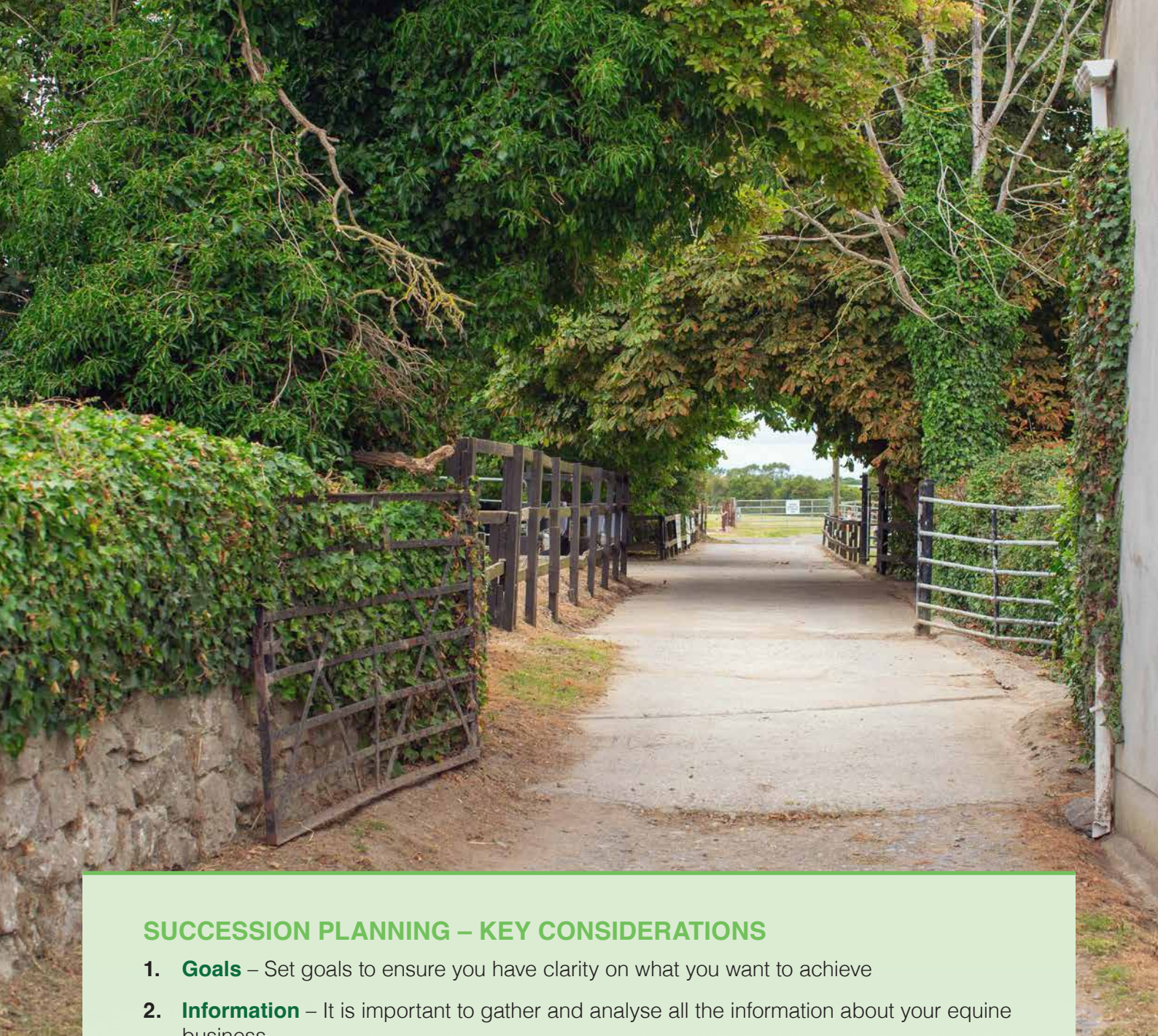


Of the 497 respondents, 67% of breeders are yet to identify a successor for their business. 21% of those without a successor have stated their family being too young as the reason for not taking action.

32% have a successor identified or a possible successor which is positive but has not moved on from our 2022 survey.

IDENTIFYING A SUCCESSOR (n=497)





SUCCESSION PLANNING – KEY CONSIDERATIONS

1. **Goals** – Set goals to ensure you have clarity on what you want to achieve
2. **Information** – It is important to gather and analyse all the information about your equine business
3. **Viability** – Use this information to assess the business' viability
4. **Identify** – Consider potential successors
5. **Liaise** – Work closely with your professional advisors to develop a succession roadmap
6. **Decisions** – Based on the outcomes of steps 1-5 now is the time to make the required decisions
7. **Plan** – Develop your succession plan. It is important the relevant tax reliefs such as Entrepreneurial and Retirement relief are taken into consideration at this stage
8. **Review** – Implementing a succession plan takes time, review it at least once a year to ensure relevancy
9. **Will** – Review and update your will in line with your plan
10. **Discuss** – Ensure that the incoming generation is happy with the plan

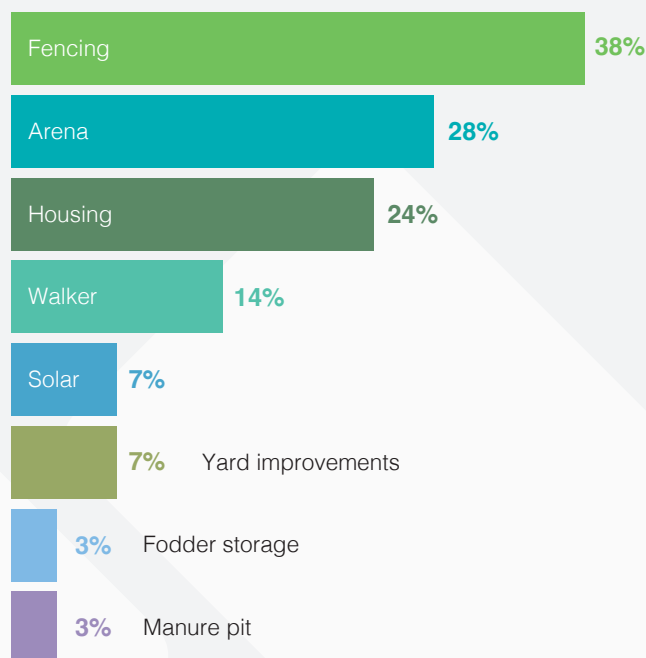
TAMS (Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme)

The equine sector was bolstered by the news of its official inclusion in the TAMS grant aid scheme. Under the Animal Welfare and Nutrient Storage Scheme, key infrastructure investment is opened up to equine breeders for housing, training facilities and equine fencing.

15% of respondents have applied or are applying for equine TAMS. 2% of respondents have achieved grant approval while a further 2% are awaiting approval. 11% are in the process of completing the documentation.

Fencing came out on top as the most requested area for investment at 38%. Followed by 28% on arenas and 24% for housing of animals. 14% are looking for grant aid with horse walkers and 7% for yard improvements. Solar panels a priority for 7% of respondents.

TAMS INFRASTRUCTURE APPLICATIONS (n=27)



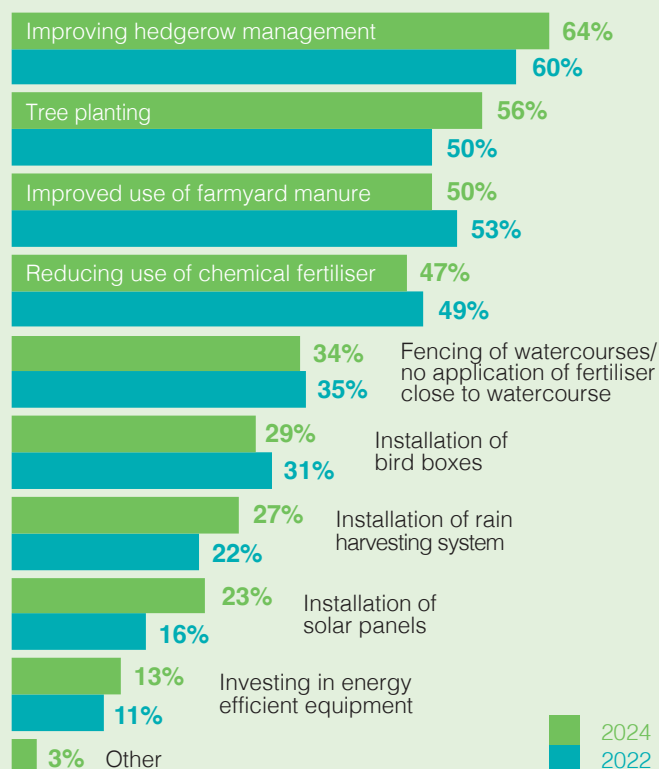
The Environment

Agriculture accounts for 67% of national land cover in Ireland, so understandably the environmental question and sustainability in farming are inextricably linked for two reasons. Namely, the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions (agriculture is responsible for almost 40%) and the need to adapt to withstand climate change. Equine farming has a unique opportunity to set new standards in sustainable land management, and carbon footprint reduction.

The most popular measure taken in this year's survey was improving hedgerow management, at 64%. This was followed by tree planting at 56%. Half of respondents are improving their use of farmyard manure and 47% have reduced their use of chemical fertiliser. 34% of those surveyed are making efforts to reduce contamination of water by fencing watercourses and refraining from applying fertiliser nearby. 29% have installed bird boxes, which provide much needed habitats for species under threat. 27% of those surveyed have implemented a rain harvesting system, which collects, filters and stores rainwater.

Solar panels have been installed by 23% of businesses and 13% are investing in energy efficient equipment.

ENVIRONMENTAL MEASURES TAKEN (n=265)



Environmental Sustainability Insights Report

Equestrianism, Equine Breeding and Equine Sport

In 2022, Horse Sport Ireland and the British Equestrian Federation commissioned equine environmental specialists, White Griffin, to undertake a research project into the risks, challenges and opportunities of environmental sustainability in equestrianism, equine breeding and equine sport. This detailed report has provided a deep understanding of the complex landscape surrounding sustainability, as well as a baseline for the industry at present, identifying both existing best practice and work to be done. Furthermore, it outlines the critical role of the equestrian sector in the rural economy and underscores the urgent need for sustainable practices to safeguard the environment and ensure the industry's future viability.

Key Environmental Impacts

The report identifies several key environmental impacts associated with equestrian activities. One of the primary concerns is the industry's heavy dependence on fossil fuels, particularly diesel, which powers generators at events and horse transportation. Additionally, the use of water to maintain ground conditions and ensure horse welfare, alongside soil degradation, monocropping, and pollution from nitrates and phosphates, poses substantial threats to biodiversity. The modern care and use of domestic and sport horses often conflict with environmental needs, leading to significant ecological challenges.



Risks from Climate Change

Climate change introduces a host of risks for the equestrian sector. Extreme weather events, such as excessive heat, heavy rainfall, and droughts, create unworkable conditions for horse welfare and disrupt event calendars. These weather patterns necessitate changes in operational practices and infrastructure investments to manage event surfaces and ensure safety. The report also highlights potential regulatory risks, such as bans on petrol and diesel vehicles, which could severely impact the industry's operational capabilities.

Opportunities for Sustainability

Despite these challenges, the report outlines numerous opportunities for the equine sector to embrace sustainability. Renewable energy adoption, enhanced biodiversity through improved land management, and the creation of new commercial opportunities are key areas of potential. For instance, adopting onsite renewables, rainwater harvesting, and sustainable land practices can help businesses become more resilient and self-sufficient. Aligning with environmental sustainability can also attract talent and secure funding from businesses and sponsors prioritising eco-friendly practices.

Best Practice Case Studies

The report includes best practice case studies from leading organisations like Coolmore and Tipperary Equestrian Centre. Coolmore, known for its world-class breeding, has implemented extensive biodiversity measures, such as maintaining woodlands, wildflowers, and native hedgerows. Tipperary Equestrian Centre focuses on minimising environmental impacts through sustainable infrastructure, including LED lighting, rainwater usage, and effective drainage systems. These examples serve as models for the broader industry to follow.

Recommendations for the Future

To drive sustainable practices, the report recommends industry-wide collaboration, strategic planning, and comprehensive education. It calls for the creation of an industry-wide education program, the establishment of clear standards and practices, and the development of a communication platform to share resources and support. Engaging all stakeholders, from grassroots to Olympic levels, is essential for fostering a culture of sustainability within the equine sector.

Conclusion

The equestrian industry in Ireland is at a pivotal moment where it can transition from relative inaction to becoming a leader in sustainability. By adopting a strategic approach and leveraging the insights and best practices highlighted in this report, the industry can secure its future and contribute positively to the environment. The collective efforts of stakeholders will be crucial in ensuring that the equine sector thrives while maintaining harmony with the natural world.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Horse Sport Ireland's recent Insights Report on Environmental Sustainability in Equestrianism, Equine Breeding and Equine Sport highlights the sector's dependence on fossil fuels, water usage, and land degradation as major environmental impacts.
2. Extreme weather poses significant risks, but opportunities exist through renewable energy, biodiversity enhancement, and new commercial ventures.
3. The report calls for strategic planning, education and collaboration to drive sustainable practices within the industry.



Scan the QR code to
download the full report



Case Study

Brian Heffernan, Farm and Garden Manager for Godolphin

Brian Heffernan, Farm and Garden Manager for Godolphin, discusses various aspects of grassland management for an equine business. He discusses managing grass across the 5,000-acre portfolio throughout the year, which includes not only horses but also utilises over 5,000 sheep and 1,600 cattle annually for grazing management. He highlights the key aspects that all equine business owners should prioritise and the need to educate equine students on effective grassland management.

Brian describes the importance of grassland management in an equine enterprise and the various techniques employed across Godolphin farms to maximise quality grass for their horses.

Grassland management is very important to us. Proper grassland management helps us reduce the need for supplementing the horses' diet with compound feed and ensures the horses are thriving. Unlike other livestock, horses don't need lush green grass and instead thrive on roughage. Horses are selective grazers, preferring the grass that grew yesterday so managing grass for horses involves a different rotation strategy compared to other livestock.

We use other livestock on all the farms to help manage grass. By mixing horses and cattle in the same paddock, we can ensure that the paddocks are grazed 100%. We aim to graze about 5-6 cattle in a paddock of a dozen horses, ensuring the horses aren't overpowered. We also use sheep to graze the paddocks back to the scutch during the winter preparing the fields for fresh growth during the Spring period. Aside from using other livestock, aeration, topping and zero-grazing are some of the processes we use throughout the year to clean the grass off fully and make up for the horses partial grazing pattern.

We soil sample every 5 years and grass sample every 2 years to get an understanding of what the land is missing. We only spread chemical fertiliser as required and instead rely on organic fertiliser from our composter. All suitable garden, shed and stable waste is composted on-site, the process includes turning the manure regularly to disperse the heat. During the summer months, it's very important to keep the manure moist throughout so we water it with rainwater from run-off tanks.

Walking the fields weekly is key to understand what stage the grass is at and what the field needs. Depending on its condition, we will either graze, top, zero-graze or close it off altogether if it is horse-sick. Fields get horse-sick after prolonged periods without a break from horses which affects the grass quality. Aeration is our number one method for preserving fields and promoting grass quality. Ragwort, buttercup, thistle, and dock as well as slow grass growth are a big problem on fields grazed by horses due to the compression caused by the animals. We use a 6-inch blade mechanical aerator on at least half of the fields every year to help the soil recover and encourage grass growth. April - May and September - October are the key periods for aeration.

“When paddocks are horse sick, your grasses don't get a chance to grow. It's compact. During the summer you'll see it's bare. It needs aeration, it needs a rest.”



Brian advocates for prioritising grassland management in agricultural education and emphasises its crucial role in overall farm productivity and animal health.

We see a lot of students on our farms who have equine livestock at home but have no idea about how to manage grass. It should be a number priority for all equine business owners, it's key to what you're trying to achieve, and everything benefits from it. You may not need extra meal or supplements if your grass is managed correctly. We use a lot of balancer pellets because generally the horses don't need kilos of feed as our grasses are good.

I learnt a lot on grass management through my studies in Kildalton College. I also attended a couple of Teagasc courses and local dairy discussion groups, despite the focus being on other farming sectors, I was able to pick up some valuable information that I could apply here. Education on the management of equine grassland needs to be promoted across the sector. It's a very different approach to managing grass on a beef or dairy farm and there's plenty that owners can be doing on their farm.

"The 'love for the pony' often means students aren't as interested in learning about grassland management but it needs to be number one."

Brian acknowledges that not all equine owners may have access to a wide array of machinery or resources to help them manage their grass but suggests some accessible grassland management tips that business owners should consider.

Equine business owners can improve their grass for horse grazing with a few key strategies. Firstly, prioritising aeration of fields is essential for maintaining grass quality. While aerators are generally affordable, you can often access an aerator through neighbouring farmers or local contractors as well. Mixing in other livestock can also be very beneficial, this doesn't necessarily require a big investment and possible partnerships with local farmers could be explored. Leveraging organic compost as a natural resource is an easy win that can help the land thrive and save money typically spent on chemical fertilisers. Any business owner can create quality compost, by keeping it moist and turning it regularly, it will be nutrient dense and very valuable for the land. Finally, it's crucial to close off fields when they show signs of becoming horse sick to prevent further damage.

People and Skills

The roots of breeding and trading horses in Ireland run deep, but tradition aside, the equine industry is a critical contributor to the economy and brand Ireland. We are globally recognised for producing quality high performance and leisure horses. This remarkable achievement is a reflection of the dedication, passion, and expertise of Irish horse breeders and the country's commitment to excellence in the sport horse industry.

The viability and growth potential of the equine industry depends on a continuous cohort dedicated, passionate and skilled stakeholders involved in the sector.

Ensuring that best practices predominate in the recruitment, training, and retention of staff within the sector, as well as in succession planning for equine businesses, is essential. It is evident that there are some challenges in this regard and addressing these is crucial for sustained growth and success.



KEY FINDINGS

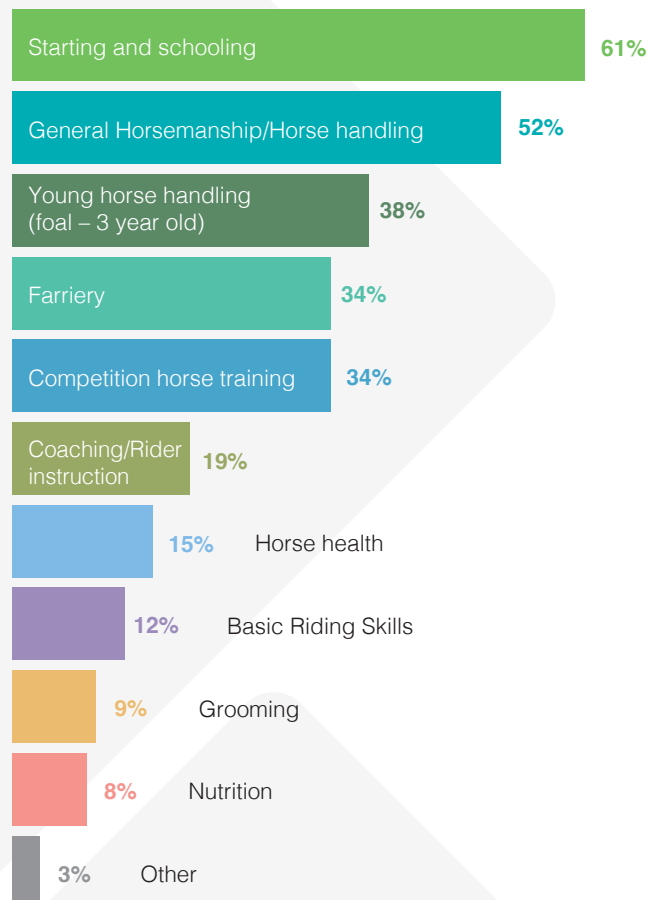
1. The most in-demand skills were starting and schooling for horses, general maintenance for farming, and communication and marketing with social media for business.
2. 77% find it difficult or very difficult to recruit people to run their equine business, with salary expectations cited as the most common reason for this difficulty.
3. 52% of business owners had no formal terms of employment for staff such as payslips, formal contracts, records of hours worked, training and development, job description, record of holidays and so on.
4. The most effective recruitment channel by a considerable margin is through word of mouth (59%).
5. Qualifications are considered not at all important for 17% of respondents, whereas experience was considered important or very important for 82% of those taking part in the survey.
6. 73% do not have access to a Human Resources (HR) professional.

Skills

The top three **horse specific skills** required by equine breeding businesses are as follows:

1. Starting and schooling (61%)
2. General horsemanship and handling (52%)
3. Young horse handling (foal to 3 year old) (38%)

HORSE SPECIFIC SKILLS IN DEMAND

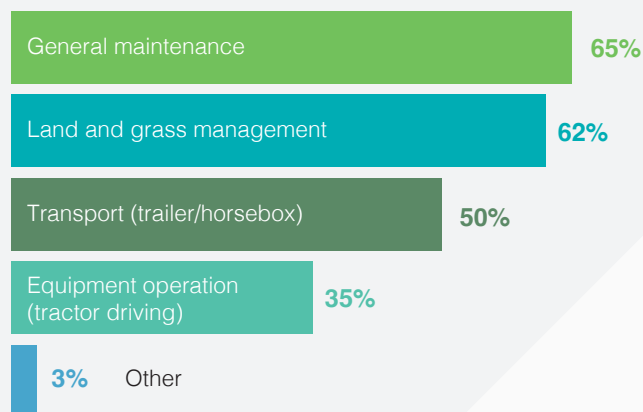




The top three **farm specific skills** required by equine breeding businesses are as follows:

1. General maintenance (65%)
2. Land and grass management (62%)
3. Transport (trailer / horsebox) (50%)

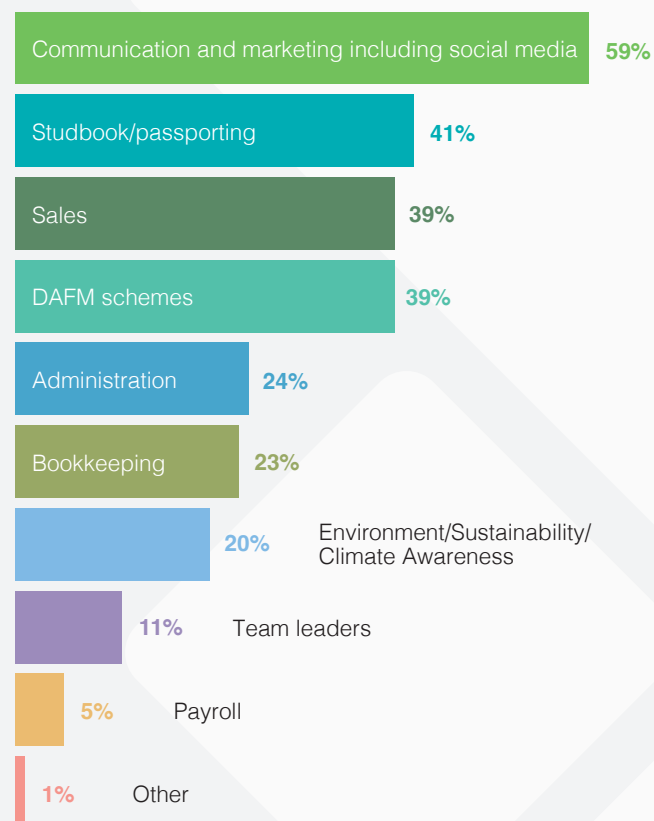
FARMING SKILLS IN DEMAND (n=329)



The top three **business specific skills** required by equine breeding businesses are as follows:

1. Communication and marketing (59%)
2. Studbook / passporting (41%)
3. Sales (39%)

BUSINESS SKILLS IN DEMAND (n=320)





Management and Recruitment

Recruitment poses a significant hurdle for the sport horse industry. The shortage of skilled and qualified individuals entering the sector is problematic. The lack of awareness and promotion of career opportunities within the sport horse industry results in a more limited pool of talent to draw from.

In our 2024 survey we identified a need for improved standardisation of key components of HR procedures and employee-centric policies, for example, a lack of key components or guidance around formal contracts, records of hours worked, training and development, key components of job descriptions, record of holidays and so on. Standardised employee centric policies and procedures would help the sport horse industry to showcase the range of career paths available, and its ability to compete with sectors that, as standard, offer training, employment and benefit packages.

This is particularly relevant in Ireland where the employment market is extremely robust and unemployment rates are the envy of the Eurozone.

We also learned there is an over-dependence on word-of-mouth recruitment within the equine industry. 59% see the word-of-mouth pipeline as the most effective recruitment channel. This approach can have the knock-on effect of excluding a more diverse range of passionate

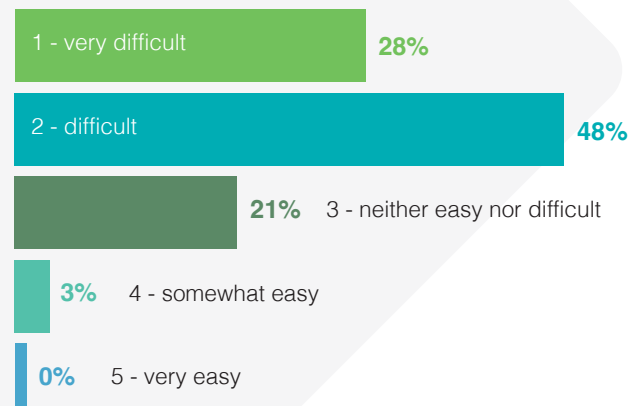
Top challenges to recruitment include:

1. Salary expectations (42%)
2. Lack of skills available (29%)
3. Work-life balance (26%)
4. Physical demands of the industry (26%)

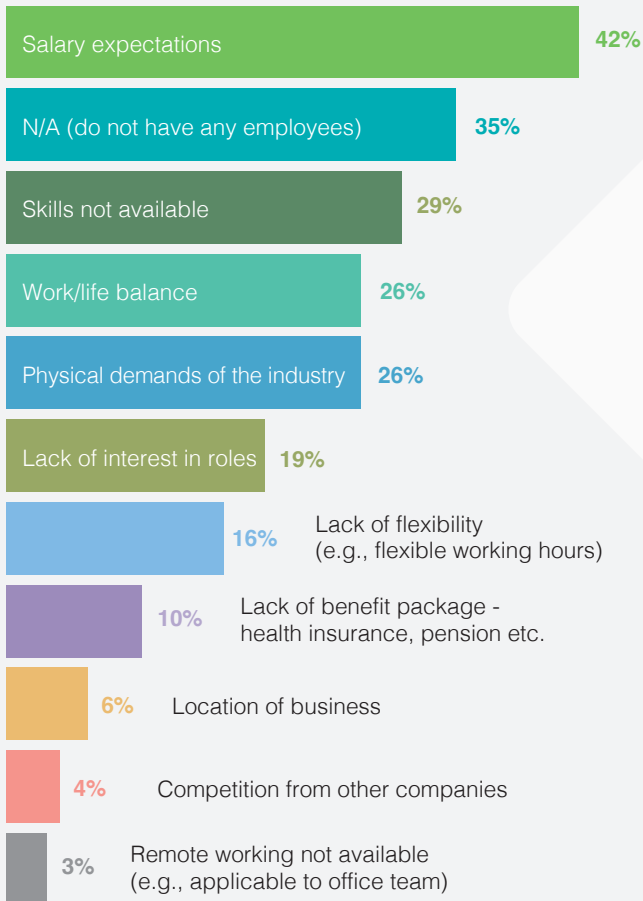
individuals, particularly those emerging in the coming years from apprenticeships and third level institutions. Only 11% use online equine job platforms, 8% rely on horse shows and events and 4% find staff through third level institutions. 4% use equine related agencies and 11% of respondents recruit staff through other channels.

Business owners acknowledge difficulties in recruiting people to run their businesses with 47% citing it as difficult and a further 30% finding it very difficult. Only 3% stated it to be somewhat easy, with 1% finding it very easy.

EASE OF RECRUITMENT (n=142)



RECRUITMENT DIFFICULTIES (n=324)



When asked to rate their skills at recruiting and managing staff, 55% of business owners indicated they felt comfortable or very comfortable with their abilities. There is an opportunity for training or upskilling on international best practices for staff recruitment and management in the equine space.

Retention

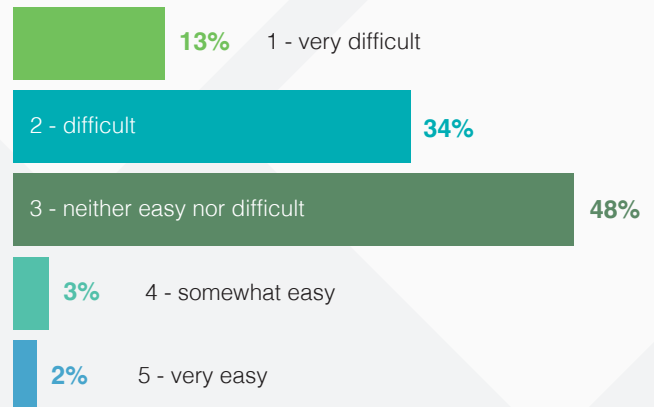
The causes of employee turnover can be sector agnostic, such as the current cost-of-living and housing crises, or they can be specific to an industry dictated by working conditions or changes in people’s life and career expectations, like the fact that 30% of those surveyed believe that the lifestyle of the equine business no longer appeals to the next generation. Whatever the key drivers for people to change jobs, retention of staff is another critical HR aspect in the equine industry that demands attention.

Many talented individuals leave the industry in search of other opportunities, leading to a loss of valuable expertise and experience. To address this at a micro level it is essential to establish a supportive and nurturing environment that recognises and rewards the contributions of staff. Implementing mentorship programs, providing

ongoing professional development opportunities, and offering competitive compensation packages are key strategies that can help improve staff retention and ensure their long-term commitment to the industry.

While the majority of business owners surveyed (77%) find it difficult or very difficult to recruit staff, difficulties in retaining current staff also exist. Only 5% of respondents found it easy to retain staff, conversely 47% found it difficult or very difficult to keep people in the business.

STAFF RETENTION (n=286)



Adherence to standard HR practices and policies needs to improve in the equine sector to attract and retain staff. It appears that employers rely on alternative methods unique to the equine sector to support retention and recruitment efforts. Employers believe the most impactful reward method for team retention is to offer free or reduced livery for a team member’s horse (43%), very closely followed by offering ongoing training and development (42%). Building a strong culture, such as a supportive team is also ranked highly as an impactful reward (38%).



Case Study

Jane Elliott, CAFRE

Jane Elliott is the Head of the Equine branch at the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) in Northern Ireland. CAFRE plays an important role in shaping the educational and training programs for the equine sector for the Island of Ireland.



Jane discussed the opportunities and challenges within the equine industry, and how CAFRE's internships and training programs help students, close to half of whom come from the Republic, to transition safely and confidently from the classroom to the working world or the yard.

Opportunities in the Industry: Mentorship and HR Resources

The equine program at CAFRE presents plenty of opportunities for graduates to work in yards that embrace positive employment practices. Under our guidance, graduates across all courses engage in valuable work placements every year both on the island of Ireland and abroad. Placements range from 5 – 52 weeks in length.

A lot of establishments offer invaluable mentorship and career advancement. These yards prioritise employee welfare, providing competitive wages and extensive professional development. These businesses sometimes have a dedicated HR person or access to a HR professional.

CAFRE places great importance on building relationships with employers who prioritise proper employment practices and provide valuable learning experiences for our students.

“All workers should have a contract of employment and be adequately insured at the very least.”

Challenges in the Industry

There are still hurdles to clear when students embark on their working lives in the equine industry. From our conversation with Jane, there are areas which some equine businesses should work to improve:

Basic Employment Practices: One of the challenges faced by students entering the industry is a lack of understanding of the importance of employment contracts, payslips, and workplace rights. Some employers also struggle to fully understand or recognise their responsibilities.

Insurance: Insufficient insurance coverage in some yards is a problem when we are trying to place students. There needs to be industry wide compliance with safety standards.

Unpaid employment: The 'working pupil' premise is a challenge as some potential employers remain attached to outdated ways of working.

Talent drain: The departure of graduates from the industry to pursue more lucrative and secure employment opportunities elsewhere puts the industry at risk in the long term.

Small vs Large Enterprises: Employment Capability

A distinction sometimes arises between small and large yards when it comes to employment capability. Larger businesses with dedicated HR departments can have more sophisticated employment practices, offering a more formalised approach to their staff management. On the other hand, smaller operations, due a lack of knowledge or resource, can sometimes find it difficult to meet employment practice demands.



The Importance of Educating Parents

Parents play an important role in guiding their children's career decisions, particularly within the equine industry, as many candidates enter into education or work as young as 16 years of age. Despite the attractiveness of some job offers, parents need to be educated about the realities of working in the sector, including proper employment practices and safety considerations. CAFRE have seen instances where parents disregard professional advice regarding work placements for their children, where we do not see health and safety standards being met. This behaviour highlights the need for parental education to protect students' interests and well-being.

Reasons Students Exit the Industry

We don't have precise figures on those who exit but a notable proportion of graduates do eventually exit the sector, often seeking more stable or lucrative career paths. Factors contributing to this trend include family commitments, limited salary opportunities, and potentially challenging working conditions in some yards. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach, including better employment practices, enhanced job opportunities, and improved industry standards.

The Impact of Business Viability on Employment Practices

While larger enterprises with a robust financial position may prioritise employee welfare and adhere to industry standards, smaller yards may face challenges in meeting these requirements due to limited resources. Without sufficiently sound financial footing, businesses may struggle to provide proper remuneration, resulting in a challenging working environment for some and compromising workplace safety.

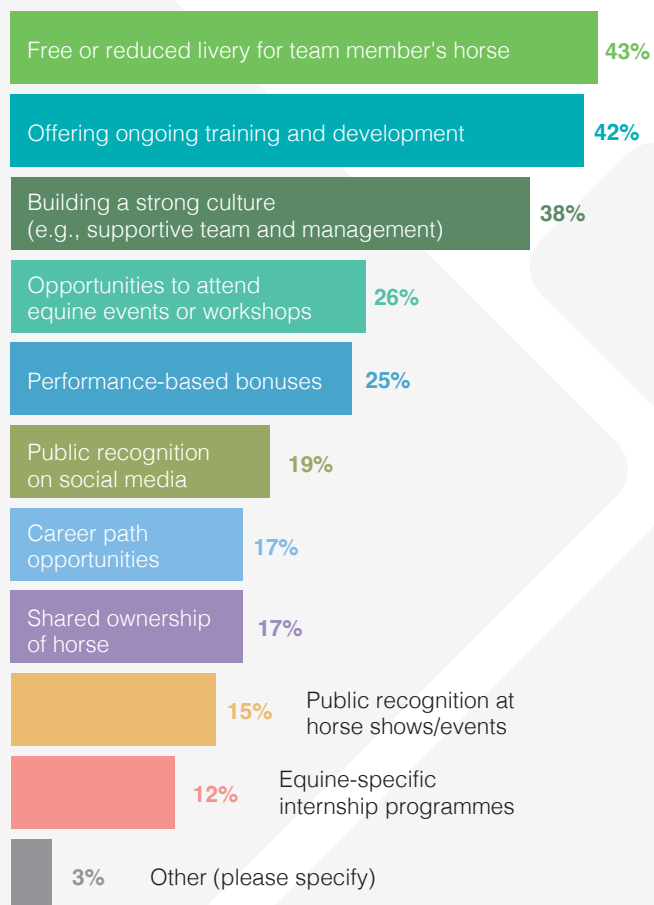
Proper employment practices within the equine industry are essential for ensuring business viability. Funding plays an important role in supporting these practices as adequate financial resources are necessary to pay employees fairly and satisfy essential workplace rights, such as insurance coverage.

We would like to see as a bare minimum from employers a safe working environment, realistic expectations in terms of working time directive and acknowledgement from employers of the need to balance private and working life.

"The equine industry is 365 days a year but there has got to be recognition that folk aren't robots and they need work life balance."

Jane believes that the equine industry offers promising career prospects for passionate individuals, however, it also has significant challenges to work through related to employment practices and workplace dynamics. By addressing these challenges, stakeholders can create a more sustainable and equitable environment for future generations of equine professionals.

SUCCESSFUL RETENTION REWARDS (n=198)



Additional Benefits

Salary expectations were the top reason for difficulty in recruitment according to respondents, so it is interesting to see what non-wage compensation is being offered to supplement salaries and entice staff. The sophistication of Ireland's employment market has led job seekers here to expect a higher standard package than in the past. Livery and stabling again comes out on top followed by coaching and mentoring, then training. Accommodation is offered by 36% of equine businesses as well as off-season breaks by 35%. Unfortunately, private health insurance, considered the most attractive of benefit packages ranks last and is offered by only 3% of businesses. A tiny percentage are also only currently offering private pension packages. This is a situation which is due to change dramatically due to the pending implementation of the pension auto-enrolment scheme coming into effect in the coming year.

ADDITIONAL BENEFITS (n=175)

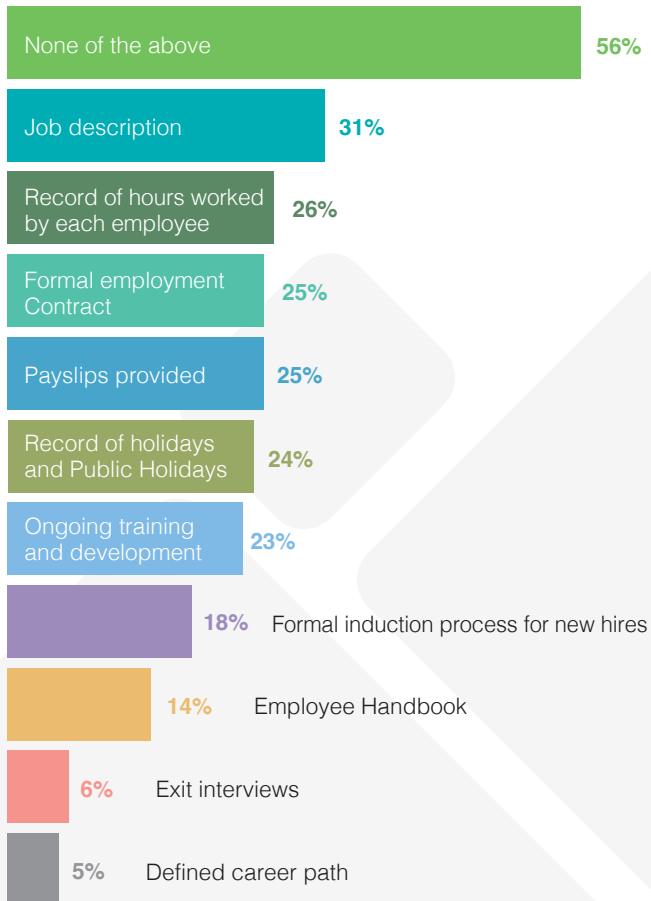


HR Best Practice and Team Training

We have seen the challenges facing equine businesses in recruiting and retaining staff so it is insightful to reflect on their HR activities and gauge how employees are managed and developed. We asked survey participants how many standard HR practices they have in place. The use of standard HR procedures in the equine sector needs to increase. 56% of respondents do not engage with any standard employment practices. 31% provide their staff with job descriptions while only 25% provide formal employment contracts or payslips.



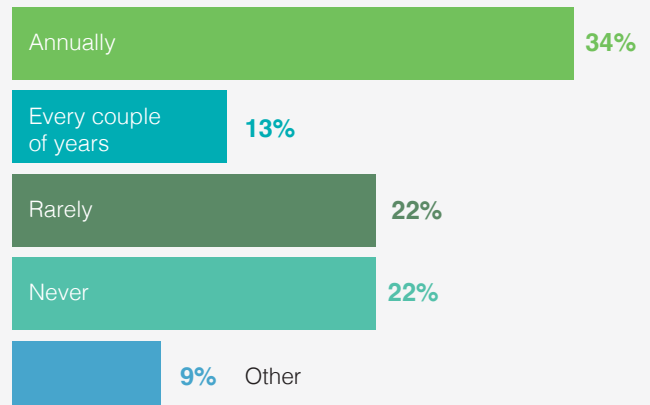
HAVE IN PLACE FOR EMPLOYEES (n=219)



26% practice recording of holidays and public holidays, and 23% offer ongoing training and development. Separately, when asked how frequently staff were offered training and development 34% offered training on yearly basis, 13% every few years, 44% rarely or never while 9% had other arrangements. We must acknowledge however, that as much as training is an investment in the future of the individual and the enterprise, it is also expensive and thus prohibitive for some businesses.

18% of employers provide a formal induction process for their new hires and 14% use an employee handbook.

FREQUENCY FOR TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES (n=200)



Case Study

Barry O'Connor, owner, coach and international sport horse agent

Barry has over 20 years' experience in the equine industry. During this period, Barry has developed a reputation for excellence in the industry and is known for his training of riders as well production and trading of horses internationally.



Barry shines a light on some of the key issues in Ireland such as training and certification, employment conditions, and insurance coverage, while also acknowledging the potential for growth.

Challenges

As someone who has worked in the equine industry for over two decades, I've seen both its triumphs and its struggles firsthand. Throughout my career, I've grappled with navigating a sector that, from an Irish point of view, while rich in tradition and passion, often lacks the necessary infrastructure and support to thrive sustainably.

One of the biggest issues facing the industry today is the lack of standardised training and certification programmes. While there's no shortage of individuals eager to pursue careers in this field, the absence of clear pathways and accreditation processes makes it challenging for aspiring professionals to gain the necessary skills and recognition. As a result, we see a workforce that is largely underqualified and undertrained, leading to inefficiencies, and missed opportunities for growth.

The widespread use of informal employment arrangements and the absence of standardised contracts adds to the challenges. Without clear contractual agreements, employers and employees are left vulnerable to exploitation and uncertainty, undermining the overall stability of the industry. Addressing this issue requires a concerted effort to educate stakeholders about their rights and responsibilities, as well as stronger enforcement of labour regulations to ensure fair and transparent employment practices.

Another significant barrier to the advancement of the equine industry is the lack of insurance coverage. While insurance is essential for mitigating risk in a high-liability sector like ours, the fragmented nature of available options often leaves individuals struggling to find adequate coverage tailored to their specific needs. Establishing a centralised resource or authority to provide guidance and support in navigating insurance options could go a long way towards alleviating this challenge and fostering greater confidence and security within the industry.

Barry talks about the level of investment that is needed and the importance of stakeholder collaboration.

Solutions

I'm optimistic about the future of the equine industry at a global level, but Ireland needs to catch-up. Internationally, the industry has progressed, but Ireland has not yet evolved. To sustain our future, address systemic issues and implement meaningful reforms, effort from all stakeholders is needed – including industry organisations, educational institutions, government bodies, and individual professionals.

Significant investment is needed in Ireland to address key issues such as training and certification for employees, overall employment conditions, and insurance coverage. There needs to be a formalised structure to employee training and a clear professional career pathway for those working in the sector. Despite extensive talent and potential, grooms progress through the industry without defined milestones and qualifications.

“Grooms should have a pathway so when they’re finished three or four years, they have an education and qualifications”

Employers also need education. While there are plenty of good employers out there offering serious opportunities to workers in the industry, there is a lot of bad practice as well. Employers need to be provided with guidance and support on good employment practice. What’s more,

it needs to be viable. If you ask employers why they aren’t paying their staff the required wage, for a lot of them, the response will be *“I’m not even getting it myself”*. The industry needs funding and investment to support employers in modernising their approach.

Internationally, the industry is growing and profitable, there is no reason why Ireland can’t grow with it.



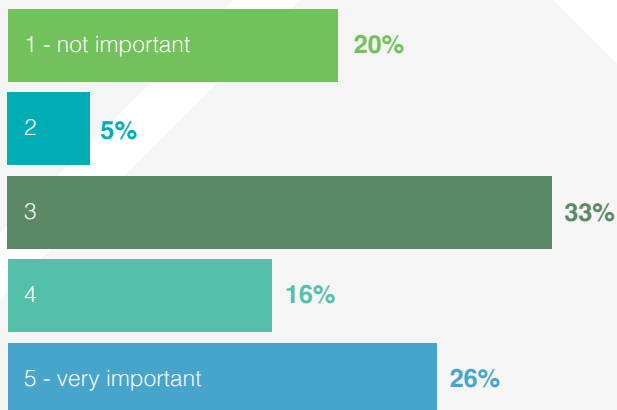
Diversity and Inclusion

It is clearly recognised that diversity and inclusion is needed in all sectors and workplaces to ensure long-term sustainability and growth, and the equine industry is no exception. The Employment Equality Act 1998 and the Equal Status Act 2000 in Ireland provides a legislative framework to protect and promote equality in the workplace.

By welcoming and embracing individuals from various backgrounds, including race, gender, age, sexual orientation, disability, and socio-economic status, work places can foster a diverse and inclusive environment, equine businesses would certainly benefit from a broader range of perspectives, experiences, and talents.

When asked about the importance of inclusion and diversity in their equine related recruitment process, there is clearly an opportunity for some awareness training around the topic. 20% of survey respondents said it was not important at all, while 26% felt it was very important. The largest percentage (33%) took a neutral position.

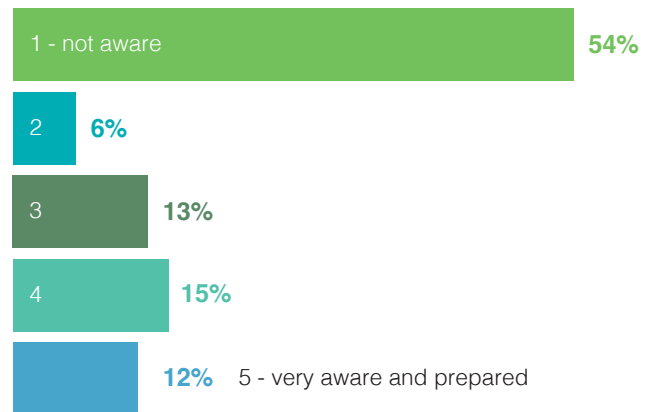
IMPORTANCE OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION (n=253)



Pension

When asked whether they were aware of the introduction of auto enrolment 54% of the equine businesses surveyed indicated they were not. Only 12% said they were aware and prepared for the event. The remainder of respondents had some degree of awareness or lack of. Employers that fail to meet the auto-enrolment obligations open themselves up to penalties and even prosecution so it is important that they inform themselves of their duties ahead of the roll out and plan accordingly as contributions will increase over time.

AWARENESS OF AUTO-ENROLMENT (n=268)



Auto Enrolment

Due to commence in 2025, pension provision will become compulsory for employees, requiring employers to budget an additional 1.5% of payroll costs to accommodate this legislative change. This is a significant change for equine employers writes Martin Glennon, Head of Financial Planning with *ifac*.

Key Features of Auto Enrolment (AE)

Auto Enrolment will apply to all employees aged 23 to 60 and earn more than €20,000 annually. New employees will be enrolled from their first day of employment and employees who do not meet the above criteria, have the option to opt in to the scheme.

Employees who are existing members of a qualifying occupational pension scheme sponsored by their employer, will not be automatically enrolled.

Contribution rates for both employers and employees will start at 1.5% of salary and increase by 1.5% every three years, eventually reaching 6% of the employee's salary by the tenth year.

Unlike traditional pension schemes, AE offers no direct tax relief on employee contributions. Instead, the government contributes €1 for every €3 that an employee contributes, equating to a 25% tax relief.

Benefits of Auto Enrolment

1. Increased Retirement Savings:

Auto Enrolment ensures that more employees begin saving for retirement earlier, increasing the likelihood of building a substantial retirement fund.

2. Improved Coverage:

The scheme targets employees who might otherwise not participate in a pension plan, particularly those in lower-income brackets, part-time workers, and younger employees.

3. Ease of Participation:

The automatic nature of enrolment eliminates the inertia and decision-making barriers that often prevent individuals from signing up for pension plans. Employees are enrolled automatically but can opt out if they choose.

Limitations of Auto Enrolment

1. Insufficient Contribution Levels:

The minimum contribution levels may not be adequate to ensure a comfortable retirement. Employees and employers may need to contribute more than the minimum required amounts but the scheme does not allow for Additional Voluntary Contributions.

2. Administrative Burden for Small Businesses:

Small businesses in the equine sector might find the administrative and financial burdens of setting up and managing pension schemes challenging, despite any provided support or incentives.

3. Cost Implications:

Employers will face increased costs due to mandatory contributions, which might be significant for small and medium-sized enterprises. Employees will also see a reduction in their take-home pay due to their contributions.

4. Impact on Wages:

The requirement for employer contributions might impact wage growth, as employers could compensate for the additional costs by limiting future salary increases.

5. No Tax Relief:

Employees take home pay will be reduced, but without the help of tax relief. Those who are in the 40% tax bracket will be hit hardest by this. An employee contributing €100 to a pension, would have a net cost of €60 (based on 40% tax relief).

6. Early Retirement:

The retirement age for AE is set at the state pension age, currently 66, whereas early retirement under an occupational pension scheme can start from age 50.

Summary

Starting in 2025, employers will need to provide and contribute to a pension scheme for their employees. They can do this through the government's Auto Enrolment scheme or through their own Occupational Scheme. It is crucial for employers to seek advice on which option best suits their circumstances.

Case Study

Lucy Katan, founder of the British Grooms Association (BGA)

Lucy Katan, founder of the British Grooms Association (BGA), the International Grooms Associations (IGA) and the Equestrian Employers Association (EEA). The BGA, IGA and EEA play important roles in promoting positive workplace practices in the equine industry in the UK and Internationally.

Lucy's story is not uncommon in the sport horse industry. She pursued a career as an international groom borne from a passion for horses, but was forced to exit the sector, due to negative workplace experiences and ill-treatment by employers.

Lucy's journey from international groom to passionate advocate for fair employment practices in the equine industry highlights the need for change and opportunities to do better in the sector.

Lucy's frustration at a lack of support led her to raise funds and set up the British Grooms Association.

"I had no-one to turn to, nowhere to go for advice"

The British Grooms Association (BGA)

Founded in 2007, the BGA aims to provide support and advocacy for grooms, ensuring fair treatment and employment practices. Its member grooms are predominantly UK citizens working in the equine industry at home or overseas.

The Equine Employers Association (EEA)

The EEA was formed in 2017 as a response to equestrian employers seeking support from BGA on issues regarding employment of grooms and the running of their businesses. The purpose of the EEA is to bolster its members' human resource management function by providing useful tools and guidance specifically relevant to the equine industry.

The International Grooms Association (IGA)

In 2022, the International Federation for Equestrian Sport (FEI) called for Lucy and her team to set up an international body similar to the BGA, to address the same employment issues that prevail at a global level. Like the BGA, the association aims to give grooms a voice and drive positive change. Global variations in employment laws present challenges, but efforts are underway to improve working conditions for grooms worldwide.

Challenges

Lucy speaks to the challenges the associations aim to address:

In our attempt to improve employment practices within the equine industry, we focus on the fundamental issues that grooms face worldwide. Key challenges include:

Poor Employment Contract Practices: It is commonplace for grooms to work without an employment contract. Unclear job responsibilities, inadequate compensation structures, and insufficient termination clauses are common. The absence of well-defined contractual terms can lead to uncertainty and poor protection for grooms. The Equine Employers Association in the UK supports businesses with HR tools and guidance. Equine employers need to have easy access to smart tools like a contract creator, or a staff handbook compiler.



Incorrect Worker Classification: In the UK the misclassification of grooms as independent contractors or self-employed individuals rather than employees poses an obstacle. This misclassification denies workers their rightful benefits, such as overtime pay and annual leave. It also raises concerns regarding tax obligations, compliance with labour laws, and insurance coverage.

Wage and Hour Compliance: Compliance with wage and hour regulations remains a persistent challenge for both employers and grooms. The nature of equine-related work, characterised by irregular hours, demanding schedules, and physical exertion, necessitates adherence to minimum wage requirements and overtime provisions. Unfortunately, these regulations are often overlooked or mismanaged, exacerbating the already precarious situation for grooms.

Worker's Compensation: The risk of workplace injuries looms large in equine-related activities, underscoring how important adequate insurance coverage is for employees. Failure to provide appropriate insurance protection can undermine a groom's confidence in their employer's commitment to their welfare and result in grooms working in unsafe environments. Many behaviours are embedded in the culture and need to change to move on from a mentality of "that's just the way it is". It is unlikely many parents would allow their child to go to work in a factory that pays below minimum wage, with no health and safety provisions and no work contract.

The 'Working Pupil': Despite its antiquated basis, the notion of the 'working pupil' still exists in the equine industry. The premise of this type of role is to allow inexperienced workers to gain experience and mentorship in the industry while working in a yard with a professional or experienced rider. The 'pupil' may bring their own horse and livery / accommodation can be provided 'free of charge' in return for the pupil's time. The reality of these roles is that they can be exploitative with workers paid nothing, or well below the minimum wage, for their time. A lack of clarity around expectations, remuneration, insurance, and legal compliance is synonymous with this type of role.

These challenges represent significant hurdles that need to be addressed to foster a more equitable and sustainable equine industry. Through standardised employment practices, promoting worker rights and protections, and fostering greater transparency and accountability within the industry, a more supportive and rewarding environment for grooms worldwide according to Lucy.

The Impact of Poor Employment Practices

According to Lucy, the effects of poor employment practices on both employees and the industry as a whole is evident. Beyond legal compliance, fostering a culture of respect and fairness is essential to attract and retain talent, particularly in light of the effects on mental health and changing attitudes among younger generations entering the workforce.

Mental Health

There is a concerning correlation between poor employment conditions and mental health issues within the equine industry. When individuals are subjected to inadequate employment practices, their stress levels escalate, leading to confusion and feelings of powerlessness. Employees often find it difficult to address arising issues given the informal and dependent nature of arrangements, particularly where accommodation and livery / stabling are included. The groom is not only responsible for themselves but also the well-being of their animal. We have seen horses get in the way of a sensible mindset. There is a power and control imbalance and consequently, the mental health of grooms is adversely affected. There is a pressing need to address employment practices within the industry to safeguard the well-being of its workforce, prevent a mental health crisis and a drain of talent forced to leave the industry.

Generation Z

Yards will struggle to retain the next generation of staff; they're not going to stick with it, they don't have to. Over the next five years, the equine industry will come to rely heavily on workers from generation Z (Gen Z), namely anyone currently between the ages of 16-25 years old. The perspectives of these individuals presents a shifting landscape within the workforce, and a stark departure from previous generations. This cohort is defined by a propensity to swiftly disengage from situations that do not match their expectations. Unlike their predecessors (Millennials, Gen X) who may have persevered out of a sense of duty or tradition, Gen Z tends to prioritise personal fulfilment and instant gratification. Consequently, the equestrian industry must brace itself for an increased wave of turnover, as individuals from this cohort are unlikely to remain in roles that don't fully satisfy them.

"The passion of the horse will only go so far with this generation...they realise when there are other ways they can earn money."

Solutions

According to Lucy, education must be the foundation to resolving the challenges around employment in the equine industry. Employees need to be empowered through education on their rights and employers must be taught a new standard to attract and retain talented staff. All of this has to occur within a framework of change management. There needs to be a change in the firmly entrenched culture which ignores workers' rights in the equine industry. Funding and support must be provided to equine business owners to give them the tools and structure to improve their employment practices.

Employers

The EEA offers resources and tools for employers in the UK to navigate legal requirements, including a simple contract creation form as well as a wide range of staff management tools.

We also created the "Good Employment" code in the UK, which employers can make a pledge to uphold.



The Code of Good Employment caters to equestrian employers across all sizes and sectors in the UK, providing guidance on governance. It is designed to help foster improved employment practices and business operations. As part of the standard, we emphasise that among various requirements, grooms must be paid at least the national minimum wage for every hour worked as a minimum expectation.

Ireland's equine industry would benefit from supports and guidance for employers, like those offered by the EEA. Investment in educating employers and an infrastructure to support their development will be key to driving change in the industry.



Employees

Employee education is just as important. The BGA and IGA empowers grooms by educating them about their rights and fostering a culture of accountability within the industry. Employees need to understand what Good Employment looks like to be able to advocate for themselves and drive positive change in the sector.

Equine training programs and institutions need to provide instruction around good employment to ensure the standards are raised and the concept permeates all aspects of the sector. The establishment of the BGA in the UK is helping to push the industry closer to Good Employment.

As well as investing in infrastructure to educate employers, Ireland needs to develop a platform for employees to grow their knowledge and provide them with the tools to safeguard themselves against poor employment practices.

Lucy concludes with:

“You need a dramatic culture change, because you’ll hear the phrase in the horse world, “That’s just the way it is with horses” but it doesn’t have to be, if we change collectively.”

Your Obligations as an Employer

Contract of Employment Ireland

Requirements within the first 5 days

- The full names of the employer and employee
- The address of the employer
- The place of work, or where there is no fixed or main place of work, a statement stating that there are various places or you are free to set your own place of work or to work at various places
- The date the employment started
- The job title, grade or nature of the work (such as a brief job description)
- The expected duration of the contract (if the contract is temporary or fixed-term)
- The rate or method of calculating your pay (e.g. pro-rata salary or rate per hour), and the 'pay reference period' (for example, whether you are paid weekly, fortnightly or monthly)
- What the employer reasonably expects the normal length of your working day and week to be (for example, 8 hours a day, 5 days a week)
- The duration and conditions relating to the probation period (if there is one)
- Any terms or conditions relating to hours of work, including overtime

Within 1 month, you must provide the remaining details:

- Pay intervals (for example, weekly or monthly)
- Paid leave, including your annual leave and public holiday entitlements
- Sick pay
- Pension and pension schemes
- Period of notice to be given by employer or employee
- Details of any collective agreements that may affect your terms of employment
- Any training to be provided by your employer
- For temporary agency contracts, the identity of the person or firm hiring the agency worker
- If the work pattern is entirely or mostly unpredictable, information about the number of guaranteed hours, the hours and days you may be required to work and the minimum notice of a work assignment
- The identity of the recipient agency for social security contributions and any protection relating to your social security arrangements

Working hours

- The maximum number of hours you can work in an average working week is 48 hours. The average working hours can be calculated by finding the number of hours you work each week and averaging these hours over the reference period.
- The reference period for employees working in agriculture is 6 months.
- If the hours you work changes from week-to-week, your employer must:
 - Tell you the start and finish times at least 24 hours before your first day of work
 - Give you 24 hours' notice if you have to work additional hours
- If an employee works on Sundays, they are entitled to a benefit, such as extra pay.



Checklist to help you stay compliant with Irish employment law

The *Workplace Relations Commission (WRC)* complete regular compliance inspections among all businesses and industries. Non-compliance may result in fines and/or criminal convictions.

What you must have:

1. Terms of Employment (Contract of Employment)

You must give your employees a copy of your core terms within 5 days of employment. The remaining terms must be issued within 1 month.

2. Disciplinary and Grievance Policies

You must give your employees a copy of your grievance and disciplinary procedures within 28 days of their employment.

3. Payslips

All employees are entitled by law to a written statement of salary.

4. Working Records

This includes days worked, start and finish times, breaks taken. Records of this must be kept.

5. Annual Leave Records

Full-time and part-time employees accrue annual leave based on hours worked. Records of this must be kept.

6. Bank Holiday Records

Full-time and part-time have entitlements to bank holiday hours depending on hours worked. Records of this must be kept.

7. Minimum Wage Payment

From 1st January 2023 the minimum wage is €11.30 per hour. (There are some exceptions)

8. Register of Employees Under 18 & Poster Displayed

This only applies if you have any employees who are under 18.

9. Valid Employment Permits

This only applies if you have any employees from outside the EEA.

If you require further support with any of the above or have any questions, please contact our consultancy team at hrrservices@ifac.ie. Contact us on 1800 714 050 or visit www.ifac.ie

Ifac.ie Disclaimer: The information in this presentation is intended as a general guide only. While every care is taken to ensure accuracy of information contained in this document, ifac does not accept responsibility for errors or omissions howsoever arising.

Research Methodology

Horse Sport Ireland commissioned *ifac* to conduct an independent survey to understand the sentiment of the equine sector in Ireland and their outlook on the prospects for the sector into the future.

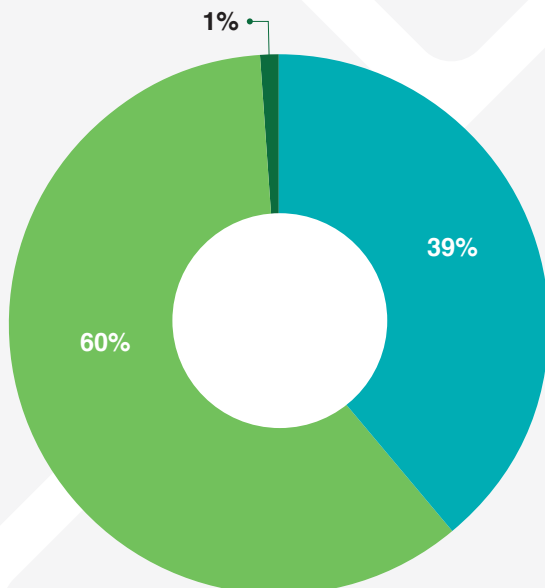
The survey was conducted online by *ifac* from December 1st, 2023, to 11th January 2024, using a dedicated online portal. A total of 603 responses were collected, providing a margin of error of +/- 3.97% with a 95% confidence interval.

Respondents answered only the questions relevant to their business, ensuring targeted and meaningful insights. Each question was independently analysed based on the number of respondents to that specific question.

Where 2024 results are being compared to 2022 results, the n number is the number of respondents to the 2024 survey.

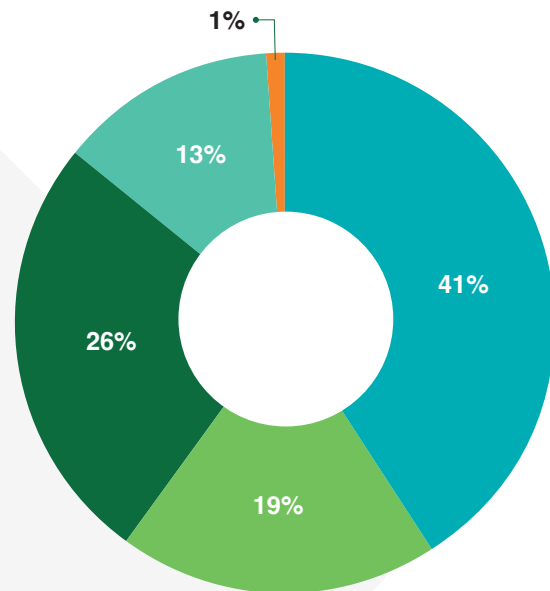


GENDER (n=1,069)



- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

LOCATION (n=591)



- Leinster
- Connacht
- Munster
- Ulster
- Other

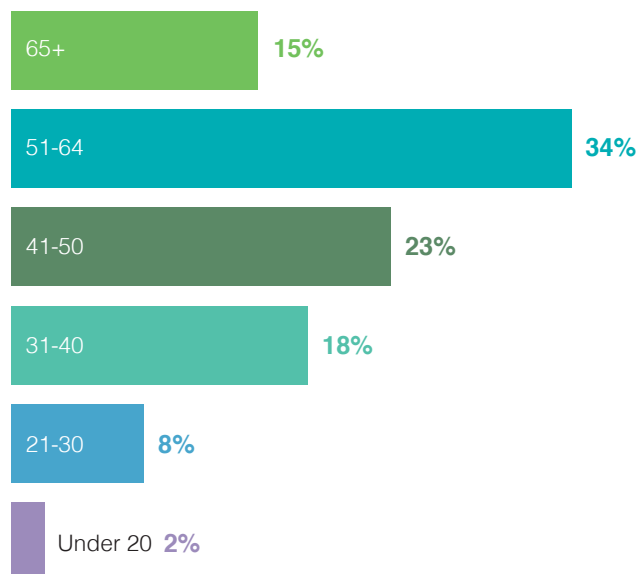


The respondents were 60% female and 39% male. The age profile of the respondents allows for sentiment from various age demographics with the largest cohort coming from the 51–64-year-old category (34%).

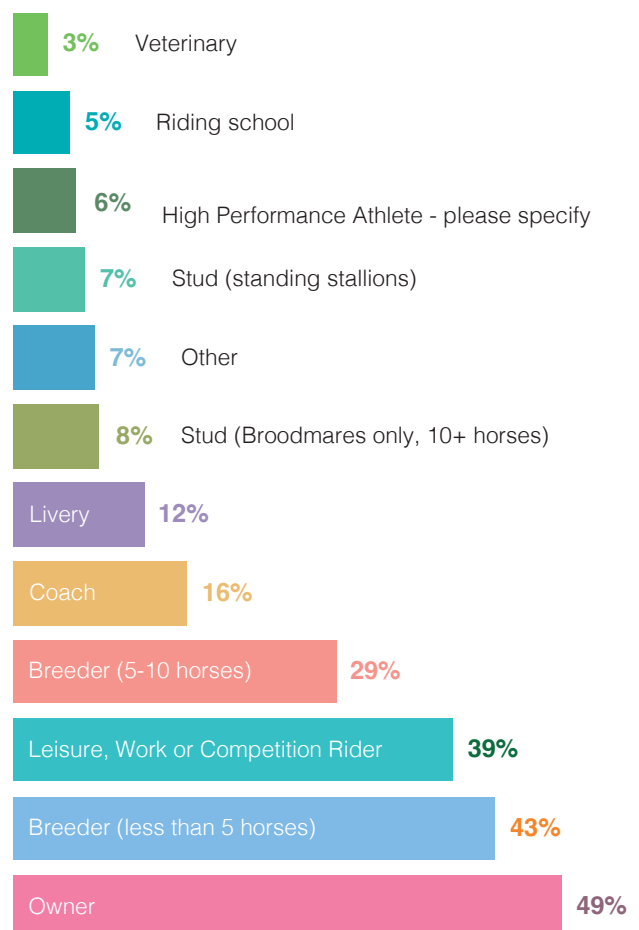
Geographically, all provinces were represented, with the majority located in Leinster (41%). In terms of business type, 49% were business owners with 43% being breeders with fewer than 5 horses, followed by 39% involved as a leisure, work or competition rider.

A sample size of 1,076 provides a confident understanding of the sentiment among equine community in Ireland.

AGE (n=600)



TYPE OF EQUINE BUSINESS (n=600)



Horse Sport Ireland

About

Horse Sport Ireland (HSI) is a company limited by guarantee, established in December 2006 by a joint initiative of the Minister for Agriculture and the Minister for Tourism and Sport. A distinguishing feature of HSI is the continual interplay between sport and breeding which are fundamental pillars for a successful sport horse industry.

Mission

To lead the equestrian sector to enable it to fulfil its potential.

Vision

to have the best horses and riders in the world.

Breeding and Sport Expertise

HSI, as a public interest entity holds a unique position in the sector. It has a role in both sport horse breeding production and equestrian sport.

High performance

As an officially recognised National Federation of the Federation Equestre Internationale (FEI), the Olympic Federation of Ireland and Sport Ireland, HSI draws upon the knowledge and expertise of the high-performance unit to meet current industry and marketplace demands.

Studbook

Horse Sport Ireland are one of seven passport issuing organisations (PIOs) approved by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) to maintain studbooks and to issue passports for registered equines (with pedigree – eligibility for entry into a studbook). These Studbooks are the Irish Sport Horse, Irish Sport Pony, Irish Draught, Irish Cob and Irish Part-bred Cob. Horse Sport Ireland is also an approved PIO for the issuance of equine identification documents, without pedigree passports.

Affiliate bodies

As the national governing body for equestrian sport, there are 26 national organisations affiliated to HSI. HSI will interface with key stakeholders on matters of common interest across the equestrian community, and act as the leader in international matters. This includes international participation at Olympic, Paralympic and European Level for Top Sport.



Horse Sport Ireland: National Breeding Services

HSI deliver national breeding services on behalf of, and funded by, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM). These breeding schemes and initiatives are open to all studbooks registered horses provided they meet the specific eligibility criteria. These schemes are devised in consultation with DAFM, geneticists and breed representative groups to support Irish breeders in making breeding decisions for their current and future equine breeding herd.

These schemes focus on driving innovation in equine genetics, monitoring equine skeletal and venereal health, maintaining sight of the potential for heritable conditions and production of young horses from foal to competition.

Reproductive Health Screening Scheme

The scheme subsidises screening for studbook registered breeding horses (stallions and mares) standing in Ireland for Equine Viral Arteritis (EVA), Equine Infectious Anaemia (EIA), Contagious Equine Metritis (CEM).

Premium Mare Retention Scheme

It is vital to encourage breeders to retain and breed from high merit performance mares. The mare retention scheme focuses on the support for breeders to professionally produce mares which they do not have the capacity to do themselves. This scheme subsidises up to €6,000, the production costs of young high-performance mares for retention for future breeding.

Embryo Transfer Scheme

The Embryo Transfer Scheme aims to reduce the generation interval and increase genetic improvement by maximising the genetic potential of Ireland's top class performance mares. Following a valid and approved online application, a payment of up to €1,500 per embryo will be reimbursed to the breeder following proof of pregnancy.

Mare X-ray Screening Scheme

The aim of this scheme is to benchmark the national mare/filly herd for the prevalence of bony abnormalities and to investigate the radiological differences between traditional and continental warmblood breeding on the skeletal structure of the Irish mare herd. Screening and radiological reporting costs are covered for eligible mares and fillies.

Starting & Schooling (I & II) Schemes

The aims of these schemes is to incentivise Irish breeders to produce future breeding horses through a designated training pathway. These are designed in 'steps of the stairs' to support breeders and owners to start and produce their horse from 3 to 6 years old.

Environmental Testing Scheme

This scheme aims to determine the suitability of their environment for equine breeding and production. It involves a farm visit by an Irish Equine Centre (IEC) microbiologist and or an environmental scientist to sample various aspects of the applicant's breeding premises. Samples will be analysed and reported back to breeders with regards the quality of feed and presence of toxins in the breeding environment.

Scan the QR code and apply for our schemes today!



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