

The Royal College of Veterinary  
Surgeons

**The Animal Welfare (Licensing of  
Activities Involving Animals)  
(England) Regulations 2018**

**Guidelines for local authority riding  
establishment inspectors  
*in England***

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## Part 1: Introduction to the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018

- 1.1 Under the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018 (Regulations), the hiring out of horses is required by law to be licensed by the local authority in which the establishment operates.
- 1.2 The Regulations apply to establishments in England. Licensing of riding establishments in Scotland and Wales remains under the Riding Establishments Acts 1964 and 1970 (Acts).
- 1.3 Separate guidelines for Scotland and Wales are available for download from the [RCVS riding establishments inspections webpage](#).
- 1.4 The Riding Establishments Subcommittee (RESC) has produced these guidelines to assist local authorities and riding establishment inspectors to apply the Regulations.
- 1.5 The Department for the Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has also issued [statutory guidance on the animal activity licensing process, last updated in May 2025](#), which sets out further detail for the minimum criteria that an establishment must meet to obtain an Animal Activities Licence.

### Scope of the Regulations

- 1.6 “Licensable activity” is defined in Schedule 1, part 4 of the Regulations and is restricted to businesses or riding establishments operating on a commercial basis and earning a fee or making a profit from the activity.
- 1.7 Schedule 1, paragraph 6 of the Regulations specifies that hiring out horses may be carried out in the course of a business for riding and/or instruction in riding, and DEFRA guidance defines the carrying on of a business in this way as a “riding establishment”.
- 1.8 “Horse” is defined at Part 1, paragraph 2 of the Regulations as including a pony, an ass, mule, or hinny.
- 1.9 The Regulations specify an exemption from licensing where trading income is less than £1,000 a year. The local authority is responsible for determining whether a riding establishment would be exempt under this provision.
- 1.10 In addition to horses and ponies in traditional riding schools, licensing is also required for, but not limited to:
  - a. trail riding;
  - b. orienteering and trekking centres;
  - c. donkey and pony rides (including beach donkeys);
  - d. instruction in playing polo/polocrosse (other than on the pupil’s own horse);
  - e. pony parties where the ponies are ridden; and
  - f. the hiring of horses for hacking and hunting (including loan horses).

## Part 2: The licence

- 2.1 A licence may only be issued or denied by a local authority following an inspection and report by a suitably qualified inspector.
- 2.2 The inspection must only be carried out either by or alongside a Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) approved riding establishments inspector.
- 2.3 Paragraph 4(4) of the Regulations provides that if the inspector that is appointed is not a listed veterinarian, the local authority must appoint a listed veterinarian to inspect the premises with the inspector. This means that before a licence is granted or renewed, the premises must be inspected by either:
  - a. a suitably qualified inspector appointed by the local authority, accompanied by a listed veterinarian who is an RCVS approved riding establishments inspector; or
  - b. a veterinary surgeon listed as above, acting as a suitably qualified inspector appointed by the local authority.
- 2.4 The RESC is responsible for maintaining the list of veterinary inspectors, setting standards for their admission and retention on the list, and ensuring as far as possible a competent and uniform level of inspection.
- 2.5 Where a listed veterinarian is carrying out an initial or renewal inspection or inspecting alone as the veterinary inspector and suitably qualified inspector, they must be authorised and appointed as an inspector by the local authority for which they are carrying out the inspection under Section 51 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and under Regulation 4(4) of the Regulations. The veterinarian must be provided with documentation to this effect. If they are not authorised and correctly appointed, they will not have the powers to inspect the premises or records.
- 2.6 Where a listed veterinarian is carrying out an annual inspection, they must be appointed by the local authority for which they are carrying out the inspection under Regulation 8 of the Regulations.
- 2.7 It is strongly recommended that a local authority suitably qualified inspector attends with the veterinary inspector wherever possible and is responsible for checking the required written records, health and safety procedures, and suitability of any issued personal protective equipment (PPE). Where a local authority inspector is in attendance, the veterinary inspector will only be required to undertake the aspects of the inspection directly linked to horse management and welfare.
- 2.8 A listed veterinarian acting as a veterinary inspector and a suitably qualified inspector must ensure that all aspects of the DEFRA guidance including records, health and safety procedures, and PPE suitability are checked.
- 2.9 The following activities do not fall within the scope of the Regulations and are not subject to licensing:
  - a. Businesses that run pony parties where none of the ponies are ridden. These should be licensed as animal exhibits under Schedule 7 of the Regulations.
  - b. The carrying on of a business solely for military or police purposes.
  - c. The keeping of horses by universities for the instruction of veterinary students.
  - d. Hired driving horses, as the Regulations do not apply to carriage driving lessons. However, over

time some local authorities have taken the view that except for Hackney Carriages, hired driving horses should be inspected on animal welfare grounds. The RESC does not take issue with this approach.

- e. Individuals who occasionally lend a horse, even if a small fee is charged, where no profit is made and there is no intent to make a profit.

2.10 Inspection of premises is required for:

- a. Previously or currently licensed riding establishments; and
- b. New applicants for licensing.

2.11 Before consideration is given to granting of a licence to a new applicant, the local authority should ascertain that:

- a. the applicant has obtained planning permission under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to use the premises as a riding establishment; and
- b. has obtained permission for change of use if either all or part of a farm or other premises are to be used as a riding establishment.

2.12 The licence is issued by the local authority after it has considered the report prepared by the veterinary inspector.

2.13 The Regulations allow for a licence period of one, two, or three years.

2.14 Local authorities have the power to revoke licenses at any time without the consent of the riding establishment licence holder, if satisfied that:

- a. the licence conditions are not being complied with;
- b. there has been a breach of the Regulations;
- c. the licence holder has supplied false or misleading information; or
- d. to protect the welfare of an animal.

2.15 The licence fee is decided by the local authority in accordance with Section 35, Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act 1974. The fee includes the cost of a mid-term inspection of the riding establishment by the local authority.

### **Length of licence and star rating**

2.16 To be granted a licence, a riding establishment must meet all the minimum standards outlined in the [Hiring out horses licensing: statutory guidance for local authorities](#) issued by DEFRA.

2.17 Provisional licences as provided for in the Acts no longer apply in England.

2.18 The Regulations provide for differing licence lengths up to three years and a star rating award depending on the standards met by the riding establishment.

2.19 The length of licence and star rating are determined by the local authority.

2.20 The local authority is required to address the following questions based on the inspection and on records of past compliance, to determine the length of licence and star rating:

- a. Does the business meet the minimum standards?

- b. Does the business meet the higher standards?
  - c. Is the business low or high risk?
- 2.21 An existing riding establishment with minor failings of a predominantly administrative nature and not compromising animal welfare can be awarded a one star one year licence where appropriate.
- 2.22 A new riding establishment must meet all the minimum standards as it will have no compliance history with the local authority and must therefore be classed as high risk and will be awarded a two-star one year licence or if it meets the higher standards a four-star two-year licence.
- 2.23 Riding establishments are encouraged to meet the higher standards set out in the [Hiring out horses licensing: statutory guidance for local authorities](#). This guidance outlines two levels of higher standards – required and optional. These are listed in Annex A of these guidelines.
- 2.24 To qualify as meeting the higher standards the riding establishment must achieve all the required standards and a minimum of 50% of the optional higher standards.
- 2.25 A riding establishment which meets the higher standards and is classified as low risk can obtain a five-star, three-year licence.
- 2.26 A riding establishment can appeal its star rating and request a reinspection.
- 2.27 Further information on the length of licence and star ratings is available in DEFRA's [statutory guidance on the animal activity licensing process, last updated in May 2025](#).
- 2.28 Where a listed veterinary surgeon is undertaking the inspection alone, they must ensure they are able to provide the local authority with the requisite information relating to higher standards.

### **Annual (interim) inspections**

- 2.29 Riding establishments must have annual inspections by a listed veterinary surgeon regardless of the licence period.
- 2.30 The RESC recommends that the inspection should include, as a minimum:
- a. the horse(s) and saddlery;
  - b. any areas of concern identified during the last inspection; and
  - c. any changes implemented by the riding establishment since the last inspection.
- 2.31 The purpose of the annual (interim) inspection is to ensure ongoing compliance with the Regulations.
- 2.32 Inspectors must ensure that animal welfare and public safety are their first consideration when carrying out inspections.
- 2.33 The RESC recommends use of the annual (interim) report form (England) and the schedule of horses inspected form for licensing inspections, which are available for download from the [RCVS riding establishments webpage](#).
- 2.34 The local authority must be notified of areas of concern in writing.
- 2.35 The annual inspection should be arranged by the local authority and take place before the end of

the first year after the licence is granted and then each subsequent year.

### Part 3: The applicant

- 3.1 The applicant must be either over 18 years old or a corporate body.
- 3.2 The local authority and the inspector are required to consider the suitability of the applicant as to their experience in the management and care of horses and their ability to supervise the riding establishment.
- 3.3 Schedule 5, paragraph 2 of the Regulations provide that the applicant must hold an appropriate formal qualification or have sufficient demonstrable experience and competence in the management of horses.
- 3.4 “OFQUAL” is the Office of Qualifications and Exam Regulation. It is a non-ministerial department set up to regulate examinations and assessments in England. A level 3 OFQUAL qualification is equivalent to an A level qualification.
- 3.5 It is generally held that the certified qualifications should cover a basic standard in practical horse husbandry, therefore a theory-based qualification in isolation is unlikely to be sufficient evidence of suitability without practical experience.
- 3.6 Other equine qualifications such as college diplomas and national vocational qualifications (NVQs) may be considered to prove the suitability of the applicant or manager.
- 3.7 The RESC consider the following to be the minimum qualifications:
  - a. NVQ Level 3 in Horse Care and Management.
  - b. Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education Level 3 Senior Groom.
  - c. BTEC Level 3 National Extended Diploma in Equine Management.
  - d. BTEC Level 3 National Foundation Diploma in Equine Management.
  - e. BTEC Level 3 National Extended Certificate in Equine Management.
  - f. BTEC Level 3 National Diploma in Equine Management (Equitation).
  - g. BTEC Level 3 National Diploma in Equine Management (Yard Management).
  - h. City and Guilds Level 3 Advanced Technical Certificate in Equine Management.
  - i. City and Guilds Level 3 Advanced Technical Diploma in Equine Management.
  - j. City and Guilds Level 3 Advanced Technical Extended Diploma in Equine Management.
  - k. BHS Stage 3 Coach in Complete Horsemanship (formerly BHSAI).
  - l. British Equestrian Tourism Riding Centre Manager Qualification.
  - m. British Equestrian Tourism Trial Leader Qualification.
  - n. Level 3 HPA Coach in Polo.
  - o. HTP Apprenticeship College Equine and Senior Equine Groom Standards.
- 3.8 The Association of British Riding Schools (ABRS) tests and the Riding for the Disabled Association Coach certificates are not currently recognised.
- 3.9 The qualifications list is not exhaustive and may change as other qualifying training courses and examinations become recognised qualifications.
- 3.10 If you are unsure as to an applicant’s suitability, please contact the RCVS Standards and Advice Team for advice by emailing [advice@rcvs.org.uk](mailto:advice@rcvs.org.uk).
- 3.11 If the applicant has practical experience only without recognised qualifications, the local authority



should obtain evidence from the applicant to support the application, and the inspector should assess the evidence in the context of the riding establishment. This will preferably take place in advance of the inspection.

3.12 Examples of suitable evidence include:

- a. a CV which details previous relevant responsibilities held by the applicant;
- b. a reference from a veterinary surgeon or farrier who can verify the applicant's experience; or
- c. a reference from a previous employer.

3.13 The purpose of the Regulations is to ensure an adequate standard of management for the riding establishment.

3.14 If the daily management and overseeing of the riding establishment is to be entrusted by the applicant to another person such as a manager, that person must have a recognised qualification such as a relevant OFQUAL regulated level 3 and/or suitable experience. The suitability and experience of that individual must also be considered and noted on the inspection form.

3.15 The Regulations provide that a licence will not be granted to a person disqualified under the Regulations or other legislation concerning the protection of animals. Provision is made for appeal to a first-tier tribunal where a licence application is refused or conditions are attached to a licence.

3.16 Please see Defra's [Hiring out horses licensing: statutory guidance for local authorities](#) for further guidance on the eligibility of an applicant.

## **Part 4: RCVS approved riding establishments inspectorate list**

- 4.1 A veterinary surgeon wishing to become an RCVS approved riding establishments inspector should send their application to the RCVS Registration Team - [registration@rcvs.org.uk](mailto:registration@rcvs.org.uk).

### **Eligibility criteria**

- 4.2 Certain criteria must be met and maintained for admission to and continued inclusion of a veterinary surgeon on the riding establishments inspectorate list (the Inspectorate):
- a. Veterinary surgeons must maintain "UK practising" registration status with the RCVS.
  - b. Veterinary surgeons must be physically fit to practise, with five years' minimum post registration experience as MRCVS.
  - c. Veterinary surgeons must have professional indemnity insurance.
  - d. Veterinary surgeons must attend an approved refresher course every 5 years.
  - e. An average of 10 hours per week of equine work is required as a minimum. In exceptional circumstances, variations will be considered by the RESC, for example, in relation to applicants in remote or urban areas.
- 4.3 All new applicants must attend a training and induction course and shadow an inspector who is also a RESC member. If the requirement to shadow is not met at a training and induction course, an individual shadowing session will need to be carried out with a member of the RESC before admission to the Inspectorate.
- 4.4 Applications are scrutinised by the RESC for approval before admission to the Inspectorate.
- 4.5 Once admitted to the Inspectorate, inspectors must inform the RESC as soon as possible if their circumstances change and they can no longer meet the eligibility criteria. Inspectors must declare that they meet the eligibility criteria at the end of the webinar series of each induction and refresher course.

### **Induction and refresher courses**

- 4.6 All courses are run by the RESC.
- 4.7 Inspectors must attend a refresher course every 5 years and will be notified by the RCVS' Registration Team when they are due to attend the next refresher course.
- 4.8 Unless dispensation is agreed in advance, failure to attend a refresher course will normally result in the inspector being removed from the Inspectorate for no longer meeting the eligibility criteria (see below in relation to removal of an inspector and disputing a decision of the RESC).

### **Removal of an inspector**

- 4.9 The RESC may remove an inspector from the Inspectorate where:
- a. As per paragraph 4.8 above, the inspector has failed to attend a refresher course, and dispensation has not been agreed in advance.
  - b. Upon receiving an application for a refresher course, it becomes apparent that the inspector no longer meets the eligibility criteria.
  - c. The RESC considers that an audited inspector's report(s) or inspection(s) fall below an acceptable standard, and the inspector has failed to make timely improvements following audit

feedback.

d. The RESC decides, for any other reason, that removal is appropriate and can be justified.

- 4.10 If an inspector informs the RESC as per paragraph 4.5 above, that they no longer meet the eligibility criteria, they will be invited to voluntarily remove themselves from the Inspectorate. Where they fail to do so in a timely manner, the RESC may remove the inspector as per paragraph 4.9 above.

### **Disputing a decision of the RESC**

- 4.11 Applicants and inspectors may ask the RESC to review decisions where:
- a. Their application to join the Inspectorate has been rejected and the applicant disagrees with the decision.
  - b. The inspector has been informed of the RESC's decision to remove them from the Inspectorate and the inspector disagrees with the decision.
- 4.12 To be eligible for a review, applicants and inspectors must notify the RESC that they disagree with the relevant decision within 14 days of the decision being communicated to the applicant or inspector. Reasons for disagreement, together with any supporting documents, must then be provided in writing within six weeks of the relevant decision being communicated to the applicant or inspector.
- 4.13 A panel of RESC members not involved in the initial decision, or the Chair, will review the decision as soon as is practicable thereafter and either:
- a. Change the decision; or
  - b. Confirm the earlier decision.
- 4.14 If the applicant or inspector disagrees with the outcome of the review, the matter will be referred for consideration by the Standards Committee at its next available meeting.
- 4.15 All decisions made by the Standards Committee will be final.

### **Appointing an inspector by local authorities**

- 4.16 Local authorities decide which member of the Inspectorate will inspect a riding establishment.
- 4.17 Under the Regulations, local authorities may only appoint listed inspectors from the Inspectorate.
- 4.18 Part 1 (2) of the Regulations provides that "listed" means for the time being listed as authorised to carry out an inspection from the RCVS approved list of veterinarians, which can be accessed via the [RCVS riding establishments webpage](#).
- 4.19 Paragraph 4 (4) of the Regulations provides that local authorities should examine the Inspectorate regularly to avoid possible adverse legal consequences should a veterinary surgeon not on the Inspectorate be used.

### **Conflict of interest**

- 4.20 Ideally, an inspector should not carry out an inspection where there is a real or perceived conflict of interest, for example where the riding establishment is an existing client of the inspector's

practice.

- 4.21 In such cases the inspector should, where possible, suggest an alternative inspector and notify the local authority.
- 4.22 If, for practical or other reasons, the inspector wishes to proceed with the inspection, and the local authority approves, the inspector may proceed.
- 4.23 The inspector should also check that the applicant for the riding establishments licence is content to progress.
- 4.24 A template form is available on the [RCVS riding establishments webpage](#) for this purpose.

#### **Payment of inspectors**

- 4.25 To avoid potential conflicts of interest, and as local authorities have a legal responsibility for ensuring that only suitable premises are licensed, inspectors should be selected and paid by the local authority.
- 4.26 The RESC has agreed to recommend that the normal hourly rate of the veterinary practice should be charged, including the time taken for preparing the report. It accepts that there will be geographical variations in charging rates.

## Part 5: Veterinary inspector's form

- 5.1 Veterinary inspectors are encouraged to use the veterinary inspector's form which is available to download on the [RCVS riding establishments webpage](#).
- 5.2 A schedule of horse(s) inspected form and a template form for new horse(s) can also be downloaded from the RCVS riding establishments webpage.
- 5.3 The veterinary inspector's form may be completed, transmitted, and stored digitally if the local authority accepts digital copies.
- 5.4 The veterinary inspector's form should be completed at the time of the inspection and forwarded to a named individual at the local authority immediately after the inspection, with any accompanying forms.
- 5.5 Where any recommendations or adverse comments are made on the veterinary inspector's form by the inspector, including for minor failings, an accompanying letter to the local authority must be included detailing the concerns and recommending a course of action.
- 5.6 The veterinary inspector's form should be used for all inspections, regardless of whether the veterinary inspector is acting as a local authority inspector or a veterinary inspector. It should also be used for annual (interim) annual inspections, although for the latter all sections may not be relevant. If this is the case, any irrelevant sections should be crossed out by the inspector. In addition, the local authority may also provide their own proforma inspection forms to veterinary inspectors acting as suitably qualified inspectors.
- 5.7 An annual (interim) report form is available on the [RCVS riding establishments webpage](#) for use when carrying out annual veterinary inspections of the horses.
- 5.8 The purpose of the veterinary inspector's form is to assist the inspector in acquiring the information required under the Regulations to ascertain the suitability of a riding establishment for a licence.
- 5.9 The relevant schedule and conditions from the Regulations are noted on the veterinary inspector's form next to the criteria along with guidance notes.
- 5.10 The information in the veterinary inspector's form should inform the local authority about:
  - a. The type of business(es) operating at the premises;
  - b. The number and identification of horses on the premises;
  - c. The attention to the welfare and health of the horses;
  - d. Suitability of tack;
  - e. The standard of the premises;
  - f. The type and standard of the teaching facilities;
  - g. The use and condition of PPE supplied;
  - h. The presence of the required statutory notices and emergency procedures; and
  - i. The suitability of the management and staffing.
- 5.11 The final section of the veterinary inspector's form deals with information pertaining to the optional and higher standards which if achieved may lead to a higher star rating for the riding establishment. Higher standards are only relevant where inspections are carried out for renewal of a licence and are not relevant for annual (interim) inspections. Not all the required higher

standards can be assessed by the veterinary inspector, and some local authority input will be required.

- 5.12 The inspector should, having considered their findings in the veterinary inspector's form, declare on the form whether in their professional judgement the premises is suitable within the terms of the Regulations to be licenced or whether any existing licence should continue.
- 5.13 If the inspector recommends that no licence be issued, the reasons must be specified in a covering letter to the local authority.
- 5.14 The inspector must sign and date the declaration in accordance with the RCVS' [10 Principles of Certification](#).

#### **Annual audit of inspector reports**

- 5.15 Individual inspectors are selected at random annually to request that copies of their inspectors' reports be provided to be audited by the RESC. Inspectors are notified on their inspector application form that as an inspector they may be required to participate in the audit scheme.
- 5.16 Where appropriate, the RESC will provide individual feedback to inspectors or general feedback via the *REIN* newsletter.
- 5.17 Action may be taken by the RESC as per paragraph 4.9 above, where reports do not meet the required standard.

## Part 6: The inspection

- 6.1 The inspector must inspect the horses and the premises in assessing the operation of a riding establishment.
- 6.2 Inspectors must provide a written report advising the local authority on both the type of equine activities performed by the riding establishment and the standard to which they are performed, with particular attention to the welfare of the horses.
- 6.3 The activities may vary from teaching people to ride in confined areas to hiring out horses for riding with or without supervision, including:
  - a. beach donkeys;
  - b. polo ponies (further information at Annex C of this document);
  - c. trekking centres and orienteering.
- 6.4 Inspections should be carried out at the time of year which relates to the use of the horses, e.g., trekking centres should be inspected during the trekking season when the animals are in full use. Riding establishments with two recognised 'seasons', e.g., polo yards with different pony populations for summer grass polo and winter arena polo, will not have all the ponies in work at the same time. A second horse audit may be required during the year to ensure all the riding establishment's ponies can be licensed for use.
- 6.5 The local authority should be encouraged to have one of its officers present at the inspection.
- 6.6 An appointment should be made with the riding establishment at a reasonable time convenient to all parties and when all the horses will be present.

### The horses and the ponies

- 6.7 All horses, ponies, donkeys, mules, and hinnies used in the riding establishment for licensable activities must be inspected.
- 6.8 All equines on the premises may be inspected at the discretion of the inspector, even where they do not fall within the scope of the Regulations.
- 6.9 Horses and ponies at part or working livery of which the riding establishment has limited use, and any animal used for providing instruction in riding for payment (whether owned by the riding establishment or not) fall within the scope of the Regulations. This would not include escort horses where they are not hired out for riding.
- 6.10 Schedule 5(6.8) of the Regulations state that the following must not be hired out:
  - a. A mare heavy with foal (after the first 6-8months of pregnancy);
  - b. A mare whose foal has not been weaned, unless there is veterinary advice to the contrary; or
  - c. A horse aged under three years.
- 6.11 The RESC have interpreted this to mean horses genuinely under three years old, in accordance with the horse's registered date of birth.
- 6.12 Additionally, the RESC consider that inspectors should assess the physical and mental maturity of any three-year-olds presented and, in the interests of animal welfare, impose strict licence

conditions on the use of these animals in the riding establishment where there are concerns.

- 6.13 The total number of horses on the premises, including those at full livery, must be recorded as 'used' and 'not used' for licensable activities.
- 6.14 Schedule 2, 3(2) of the Regulations provide that the maximum number of horses kept for licensable activity at any time must not exceed the maximum that is reasonable, having considered facilities and staffing levels. The total number must be recorded.

#### **Veterinary inspection of the horses**

- 6.15 Schedule 5, 6(1) and (4) of the Regulations provide that each horse must be suitable for the purpose for which it is kept and must not be hired out if due to its condition its use would be likely to cause it to suffer. The horses must be in good health and in all respects physically fit.
- 6.16 Every horse must be examined in a suitable safe area in good light.
- 6.17 The inspector's findings should be recorded on the schedule of horses inspected form, available on the [RCVS riding establishments webpage](#).
- 6.18 The horse's description must be noted including its name, gender, height, and colour. It is not necessary to record breed.
- 6.19 All horses and ponies must be microchipped and passported. The horse's microchip must be scanned, cross referenced with its passport, and noted. The horse's name, unique equine life number, and the microchip number must appear on the licence.
- 6.20 The horse's dental age should be checked, and the mouth must be assessed including checking for injury caused by tack.
- 6.21 The clinical inspection of each horse must include auscultation of the heart and chest at rest and an ophthalmoscopic assessment of both eyes.
- 6.22 Schedule 5 6(6) of the Regulations provide that attention must be paid to the state of the feet which must be properly trimmed, and to the shoes if shod. The foot condition must be noted as well as any badly worn, cast, or loose shoes. Examination of the farriery book may be helpful in judging whether the foot is being given sufficient care.
- 6.23 The animal must be seen tacked up in its own tack during the inspection. The inspector must assess the items of tack with respect to fit, bearing in mind the animal's welfare and the safety of the rider.
- 6.24 A careful inspection must be made for any sores or galls caused by tack as well as any other injuries. This will necessitate the removal of the saddle at the very least. Injuries must be noted and their significance relative to the animal's work assessed.
- 6.25 The horse must be walked and trotted in hand on a hard level surface to assess limb soundness.
- 6.26 Any item of tack found to be damaged or unfit for use must immediately be removed from use (further information in the saddlery section below).
- 6.27 Inspectors may wish to begin their inspection with the horse tacked up.



- 6.28 Horses need not be ridden during the inspection unless at the discretion of the inspector.
- 6.29 All animals found to be ill or injured must be recorded.
- 6.30 When abnormalities are found, they must be assessed in respect of both the horse's welfare and the rider's safety, and an immediate decision must be made as to whether the animal should be withdrawn from use.
- 6.31 The inspector must not attempt to make a diagnosis or suggest treatment but should direct the owner or manager to consult their own veterinary surgeon.
- 6.32 If a horse is found to need veterinary attention, the inspector must verbally order the owner/manager to remove the horse from work. The order must be confirmed in writing as soon as possible at or after the inspection. The horse may only be returned to work when the owner has obtained, at their own expense, a veterinary certificate stating that the horse is fit to return to work and submitted this document to the local authority.
- 6.33 Template forms for the withdrawal of horses and return to work of horses can be downloaded from the [RCVS riding establishments webpage](#).
- 6.34 Where a horse is declared by the owner/manager during the inspection not to be in work because of lameness, illness, or injury, the inspector must be satisfied that the appropriate treatment is carried out. A return-to-work certificate may be required at the discretion of the inspector.
- 6.35 Any restrictions must be noted on the schedule of horses inspected form with a copy sent to both the riding establishment and the local authority. This document can be downloaded from the [RCVS riding establishments webpage](#).
- 6.36 The horses must be adequately exercised, groomed, rested, and visited at suitable intervals. Suitable intervals are at least daily for horses at grass and twice daily for stabled horses.
- 6.37 The inspector must examine the daybook, appointment dairy, stable records, or database (which should be kept in permanent form) to ensure that the requirements at paragraph 6.36 above have been satisfied, and to ascertain the individual's daily workload (including the maximum permitted weight of the rider).
- 6.38 A preventive health care plan must be in place which includes measures to be taken to prevent and control disease. This would include indicating if vaccination has been discussed, although this is not a requirement under the Regulations. Further information can be found at Annex D of this document.
- 6.39 Frequency of farriery and dental care and any individual medical requirements must be detailed and recorded by the riding establishment as part of a structured individual care plan.
- 6.40 The riding establishment must have a satisfactorily documented parasite control programme.
- 6.41 The Regulations require that the behaviour of the horses must be monitored to ensure pain, fear, and distress are minimised, and that training methods and equipment used are humane. Competent staff are required to facilitate this, and stress behaviours must be recorded on individual horse records and acted upon.

### **New horses introduced to a riding establishment between inspections**

- 6.42 New horses introduced to a riding establishment between licencing inspections must be added to the licence as only equines listed on the licence may be used for the licensable activity. The licence must state the name, unique equine life number, and the microchip number of all the horses at the premises used for the licensable activity.
- 6.43 The licence holder must inform their local authority of changes to the list of horses used in a timely manner. New horses must be certified as fit for purpose by a veterinary surgeon and the licence must then be varied by the local authority before the horses are brought into use.
- 6.44 Where there is a major change in the horse population, for example where a new riding establishment is licensed but most of the horses arrive after the initial inspection, a re-inspection is advisable.

### **Saddlery**

- 6.45 The Regulations require that riding equipment must be kept in good condition, not cause suffering to the horse or accident to the rider, and be suitable for use in the riding establishment.
- 6.46 Inspection of tack must be carried out in a good light and be fitted on the horse for which it is intended to ensure that correct fit can be established.
- 6.47 Saddles must be checked regularly for correct fit and checks should be carried out more frequently where the horses are young or prone to weight change. Particular attention should be paid to, the condition of the leather or synthetic material used in its construction, the buckles, stitching and padding, and the degree of wear on bits. Leather should not be dry and should not crack when fully bent.
- 6.48 Any item of tack deemed to be unsatisfactory due to its type or condition must be taken out of use immediately and noted on the report form.
- 6.49 The following items are unacceptable in a riding establishment: poorly fitting saddles or those with broken trees, nickel stirrups, stirrups with worn or smooth treads, worn or dirty girths and numnahs, smooth worn rubber grip reins, and synthetic girths with split margins. Some bits such as a running gag may be considered unsuitable on horses used for teaching purposes.
- 6.50 There must be adequate safe storage for saddlery and tack.

## Part 7: The premises

- 7.1 Buildings and premises can cause a number of issues for riding establishments. These tend to be easy to address when a potential riding establishment is being inspected for the first time, as the licence will not be granted by the local authority until the premises meet all the minimum standards set in the Regulations and guidance.
- 7.2 The introduction of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 gave increased urgency to the provision of a suitable environment for all animals and improvements may be recommended on this basis.
- 7.3 The Regulations require that horses be kept in an environment suitable to their species and condition (including health status and age) with respect to their behavioural needs.
- 7.4 The environment's situation, space, air quality, cleanliness, temperature, water quality if relevant, noise, light levels, and ventilation must be assessed. Specific recommendations noted in the [Code of practice for the welfare of horses, ponies, donkeys and their hybrids](#) should be complied with.
- 7.5 Although a veterinary surgeon is not an expert on electricity, fire, drainage, etc., they should report any obvious defects or areas of concern to the local authority.
- 7.6 The inspection must include not only the riding establishment buildings but also the fields and paddocks used and any indoor/outdoor arenas. Grazing is not mandatory for a licence to be granted.
- 7.7 Cow sheds, pig sties, and some other agricultural buildings are not usually suitable without significant modification for housing horses.
- 7.8 Consideration must be given to the number of horses kept at the riding establishment, including at livery, in relation to the buildings and land available.
- 7.9 The Regulations require that the riding establishment must have provisions to bring all horses under cover should the need arise. This can include off-site facilities.

### Horse accommodation

- 7.10 The Regulations require that all areas, equipment, and appliances to which animals have access must present minimal risks of injury, illness, and escape. It is required that they are constructed in materials that are strong, safe, durable, in a good state of repair, and well maintained.
- 7.11 Building construction must be robust, adequate to contain the animal, provide shelter and warmth, and be in clean and hygienic condition.
- 7.12 Access to boxes and stalls must be safe and convenient.
- 7.13 Passageways should be sufficiently wide to enable horses to be safely led past other horses.
- 7.14 Stalls must be large enough to allow the horse to lie down and get up safely, and access food and water with sufficient room behind to allow a horse to back out safely.
- 7.15 Stall kept horses must spend a significant amount of their day out of the stall.

- 7.16 Loose boxes should be large enough to allow the horse to get up and down and move around easily.
- 7.17 There must be adequate ventilation providing regular air changes and good air circulation without significant draughts.
- 7.18 Roofs must be high enough for a minimum clear space to the eaves of 60-90cms above the ears of the horse in a normal standing position.
- 7.19 Both stalls and loose boxes must be free of sharp or rough edges, fittings and projections or other structural features that might cause injury to or entrap equine occupants.
- 7.20 Interior surfaces must be waterproof and able to be disinfected where appropriate. Timber must be well maintained with any damaged areas sealed or over-clad.
- 7.21 Solid doors should open outwards or through slide mechanisms and be strong enough to resist impact, close securely and be of a height to allow the horse to look out and a width to allow safe passage.
- 7.22 Floors must have a non-slip solid and even surface. There should be sufficient clean and non-dusty bedding to encourage the occupant to lie. Any rubber matting must appear to have been cleaned regularly, and a small amount of bedding must be available.
- 7.23 Lighting must be adequate to render the use of artificial light unnecessary during daylight hours and allow staff to observe the animals.
- 7.24 Artificial lights must be turned off to provide a period of overnight darkness. Horses must be protected from injury from light switches and wires.
- 7.25 If the inspector is in any doubt about the safety of electrical equipment, they must report this to the local authority and request in writing that the installation is checked by a qualified electrician.
- 7.26 Windows must be of safety glass or mesh protected.
- 7.27 Drainage must carry away liquid voided by the horses and there must be no standing water or pooling.
- 7.28 Wastewater must not run off into adjacent stables.
- 7.29 There must be provision for the storage and disposal of manure and soiled bedding, and this must be located sufficiently far from the buildings to avoid the risk of fire and spread of disease. A minimum distance of 10 metres is advised.
- 7.30 The muck heap must be removed from site at regular intervals in accordance with the relevant legislation and avoid contamination of waterways.
- 7.31 There must be a constant supply of clean drinking water in a suitable clean container in each stable or stall.
- 7.32 Pony lines/tie up areas must be safe, clean and well maintained.
- 7.33 Horse kept in turn out pens must have a wind break or shelter and have an adequate water supply.

## Grazing

- 7.34 Grazing is not mandatory under the Regulations for a licence to be granted. However, the welfare of horses depends on opportunities to exercise to benefit the animal's physical and mental health. Field time forms a part of this enrichment.
- 7.35 The Regulations require that horses maintained at grass must always have clean drinking water, shelter, and adequate pasture.
- 7.36 It is generally recommended that a minimum of one acre per horse is required, with two acres being necessary if outdoor exercise areas are provided and hay or haylage is to be produced.
- 7.37 Where riding establishments do not have access to the recommended acreage, inspectors must ascertain how the horses exercise requirements are to be met and how waste disposal is to be managed.
- 7.38 Fences must be maintained in a safe condition, free from hazards and loose or broken rails. Where plain wire is used, measures should be taken to ensure visibility to horses.
- 7.39 Field gates must be robust and safe, easy to open and close, and secure.
- 7.40 Water troughs must be securely fixed and accessible to all at a site where there are no access risks.
- 7.41 Horses at grass must be inspected daily at a minimum, or as often as necessary for the individual health and welfare of each horse.
- 7.42 Fields must be free of rubbish, parked machinery, and any other dangerous objects likely to cause injury to horses.
- 7.43 There must be absence or control of injurious weeds including ragwort.
- 7.44 Grazing must be managed, including dung removal, harrowing and reseeding where appropriate.
- 7.45 Horses kept at grass may require supplementary feed (if necessary), either when in work or during the winter months.
- 7.46 Each horse must have its own feeding site, and care must be taken to ensure all horses are getting sufficient food.
- 7.47 The feed requirement will depend on the type and age of the animal, its workload and the pasture provided. TBs, Arabs, and warmbloods may need stabling as well as additional food during the winter.
- 7.48 Native ponies and cobs are hardier and can usually overwinter at grass provided there is shelter available and supplementary feeding or additional grazing available as necessary.
- 7.49 The licence holder must demonstrate that horses are monitored to check that they are neither too hot nor too cold. Turnout rugs will provide some protection from the elements but must be checked daily and removed at least twice a week to ensure the animal is clean and dry underneath.

- 7.50 The shelter provided may be natural or manmade, sufficient for all the animals and suitable for all adverse weather conditions. Where manmade field shelters are provided the access/egress must be sufficiently wide for at least two horses to pass at a time.
- 7.51 More specific guidance regarding grazing is provided in the [Code of practice for the welfare of horses, ponies, donkeys and their hybrids](#).

### Teaching facilities

- 7.52 Teaching facilities must be inspected.
- 7.53 There must be a safe suitable area for initial rider assessment.
- 7.54 The surface of a riding arena must be well drained and free of standing water. It must be maintained regularly to keep it level and smooth, dust free, and free of trip hazards for the horses, for example exposed membranes or sub-surface. It should have a degree of “give” consistent with the nature of the surface material of which it is composed.
- 7.55 Indoor schools should have no central roof stanchions. Stanchions around the walls must be either outside of the innermost protecting wall or well-padded up to a height above the head of a rider on the tallest horse in the riding establishment. If present, central stanchions must be similarly padded. There must be no projections or gaps, either around the walls or elsewhere in the school that could cause injury to horse or rider.
- 7.56 Outdoor schools must be properly fenced and maintained so that no injury is caused to horse or rider. Light stanchions must be padded (as above) if they are close to the riding area.
- 7.57 Both indoor and outdoor schools must have a clear access and egress point, with functioning doors or gated to prevent horses escaping onto public land.
- 7.58 Grassed paddocks or surfaced areas used for riding (including outdoor dressage arenas) must be suitably maintained and only be used when conditions allow e.g., seasonally. The surround must be safe for the horse and rider and be suitably fenced to contain a horse if a rider loses control or falls.
- 7.59 Any jumping or similar equipment must be fit for purpose, maintained in a good state of repair, checked weekly for safety, and stored out of the school when not in use.

### Feed

- 7.60 There must be suitable storage facilities for feed, bedding, and stable equipment.
- 7.61 Feed bins/containers must be clean and dry and clearly labelled on the bin (not the lid) as to their contents. Feed must be stored in a cool, dry, and vermin free area, off the floor and away from possible contamination from noxious substances.
- 7.62 There must be a suitable food preparation area with adequate hand-washing facilities connected to a suitable drainage system.
- 7.63 There must be a system of disposal of waste feed.

- 7.64 There must be a plan/record of feeding for each horse, and their body condition must be monitored and recorded on a regular basis.
- 7.65 Each horse must be provided with a suitable diet in terms of quality, quantity, and frequency for their needs and workload, to enable it to maintain an appropriate physical condition.

### Statutory notices

- 7.66 The Regulations require that the following notices are displayed:
- a. The full name, address, and the telephone numbers (including a mobile telephone number where possible) of the licence holder or other responsible person must be displayed prominently and clearly on the outside of the premises. The postcode should also be displayed on the notice to assist the emergency services to locate the property in the event of an emergency. This notice is particularly important at premises at which no one lives permanently, or which are left unattended for long periods during the day.
  - b. Clear instructions regarding action to be taken in the event of fire or another emergency. This notice must be in a prominent place and large enough to be easily read and on a public facing site. While the small plastic notices available from some equine societies may satisfy the letter of the law, they do not satisfy its intention and should be discouraged as they are considered inadequate.
  - c. Permanent “No smoking” signage must be present in all areas of the premises.
  - d. A copy of the licence including the name of the licence holder and the licence number must be clearly and prominently displayed on any website used in respect of the licensable activity.
  - e. Certificate of employer’s public liability insurance if applicable which must be displayed along with a copy of the licence.
  - f. Certificate of public liability insurance. The Regulations specify that the licence holder must hold a current public liability insurance policy to provide indemnity against legal liability for paying:
    - i. damages for accidental bodily injury, death or damage to property to those hiring a horse for riding or receiving instruction in riding resulting his/her activities; or
    - ii. those of members of staff or clients in connection with their business.
    - iii. The name, address and telephone number of the riding establishment’s own veterinary surgeon must be readily available to all staff on the premises and must be prominently displayed at the premises in case of emergency. Any separate out of hours arrangements must also be displayed.

### Management and records

- 7.67 The licence holder must ensure that all records that the licence holder is required as a condition of the licence to keep are available for the inspector to request and review at any time. The reports must be available in a visible and legible form or, if electronically stored, must be readily produced. This must include a register of all horses kept on the premises for the licensable activity and each horse’s valid passport showing its unique life number and microchip number.
- 7.68 The licence holder is deemed to be the keeper of the horse, in the absence of the owner, and has legal responsibility to ensure that the horse has an up-to-date identity document.
- 7.69 The licence holder must keep all records for at least three years from the date the record was created.

## Part 8: Health and safety

### Fire precautions

- 8.1 Owners, managers, and staff must be made aware that their primary duty in the event of fire is to phone the fire brigade, attend to the safety of people at the premises, and extract the horses.
- 8.2 Firefighting is dangerous and should be left to the professionals. However, the inspector must note the presence of fire alarms, fire-fighting equipment such as water buckets, hoses, and fire extinguishers. The latter should be serviced annually, and the last service date should be recorded.
- 8.3 There must be clear access to all stables, loose boxes, and fire exits to allow for emergency evacuation and an awareness of possible entrapment of horses and procedures to release them.
- 8.4 A suitable holding area away from the housing where animals may be temporarily contained should be identified and staff notified accordingly.
- 8.5 All stables must comply with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. A written fire risk assessment and an emergency plan must be in place.
- 8.6 If the inspector finds that either of these requirements have not been fulfilled by the riding establishment, the local authority must be notified.
- 8.7 A written emergency plan acceptable to the local authority must be known and available to people on the premises used for the licensable activity. This plan should set out the appropriate steps to be taken to protect all the people and animals on the premises in case of fire, breakdown of essential heating, ventilation, air filtration systems, or any other emergencies.
- 8.8 The inspector should check the riding establishment has complied with the requirement for the written emergency plan but need not concern themselves with the details.
- 8.9 The inspector must report to the local authority any fire hazards that are identified during the inspection, including obstructed exits, exposed wiring, and excess cobwebs.
- 8.10 Emergency drills should be practised at least annually or as determined by the fire risk assessment. All new staff members should do a drill as part of their induction programme.

### Disease control and first aid

- 8.11 The Regulations require that all reasonable precautions are taken to prevent and control the spread of infectious or contagious diseases, pathogens, and parasites among the horses. They also provide that veterinary first aid equipment and medicines must be provided and maintained on the premises in a clean state in a place set aside for that purpose.
- 8.12 First aid equipment may include antiseptic products, dressings, bandages, scissors, and a thermometer.
- 8.13 A portable first aid kit must be available if riding establishment horses are used off site e.g., trekking centres.



- 8.14 A current human first aid kit must also be available, which can be used off site. A list of people qualified in first aid must be displayed at the premises.
- 8.15 There must be an accident reporting procedure that complies with the Health and Safety Executive requirements.
- 8.16 Medicines and cleaning products must be stored in a safe location and used appropriately in line with veterinary or manufacturer's instructions, including storage temperatures.
- 8.17 It is recommended that prescription only medications be kept in a safe, lockable container which can only be accessed by authorised staff members/key holders.
- 8.18 Any medication given must be prescribed by a veterinary surgeon and each instance recorded. Where required, POM-V medicines administered must be recorded in the horse's passport.
- 8.19 If sharps are used, these must be disposed of in a yellow sharp's container kept in a secure location and emptied as hazardous waste.
- 8.20 Cleaning and disinfection products must be suitable and effective and kept entirely out of reach of animals.
- 8.21 Horses must not be left unattended in any situation for any period likely to cause them distress.
- 8.22 A documented system of recording illness, injury, or behavioural problems must be kept up to date.
- 8.23 Inspector's must satisfy themselves that all sick or injured animals have received prompt attention from a veterinary surgeon. The name, address, and telephone number of the attending veterinary surgeon must be readily available to all staff on the premises and must be prominently displayed at the riding establishment in case of emergency.
- 8.24 The inspector must be satisfied that there is a suitable and well-lit area for a veterinary surgeon to inspect the horses.
- 8.25 Adequate facilities for the isolation of any animal with an infectious disease must be available with no public access. The latter may be an isolation paddock or stable which may be off site. Riding establishments should have the ability to isolate animals for up to 21 days.
- 8.26 The riding establishment must demonstrate that it has a satisfactory disease control programme, and a biosecurity plan agreed with a veterinary surgeon. Further information can be found at Annex E of these guidelines.
- 8.27 Routine vaccination, although not a requirement under the Regulations, should be discussed and recorded as necessary. Homeopathic vaccination is not considered to be an acceptable form of preventive treatment.
- 8.28 Internal and external parasite control programmes and prevention should be discussed and recorded.
- 8.29 Every horse must have an annual dental check with a veterinary surgeon or qualified equine dental technician (EDT), which should be recorded.

- 8.30 A written procedure must be in place and implemented for the following:
- a. Feeding regimes;
  - b. Cleaning regimes;
  - c. Transportation;
  - d. Monitoring and ensuring the health of all the horses, including the introduction of new horses to existing groups to avoid individual stress;
  - e. The prevention, control, and spread of disease; and
  - f. The death or escape of a horse, including the disposal of carcasses.
- 8.31 A written procedure must also be in place covering the care of horses following the suspension or revocation of a licence or an emergency, e.g., the death of the riding establishment's owner.
- 8.32 All people responsible for the care of the horses must be aware of the written procedures.
- 8.33 Staff must ensure that all animals are kept clean and comfortable.
- 8.34 Stables must be cleaned of faeces daily and be capable of thorough cleaning and disinfection, as necessary.
- 8.35 A documented procedure must be in place detailing how good hygiene standards are maintained and the routine daily cleaning regime.
- 8.36 Procedures for transportation are difficult to confirm during an inspection, but the inspector should be satisfied that there is an awareness of the conditions imposed by current legislation and the transported horse's environmental and welfare requirements are met.
- 8.37 Euthanasia of horses must only be carried out by a veterinary surgeon or licenced horse slaughterer after checking the horse's identity. The procedure and disposal route of the carcass must be recorded.

#### **Health and safety assessment**

- 8.38 Health and safety matters are generally considered to be the remit of the local authority inspector. The veterinary inspector should be satisfied that the riding establishment has the relevant documentation but need not be concerned with the detail.
- 8.39 The veterinary inspector should ask to see the riding establishment's health and safety assessment. If an assessment is not available, the proprietor should be reminded of the need for one to comply with the terms of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. The enforcement of this, however, lies with the local authority.
- 8.40 There must be a COSHH assessment in place for the management of infectious disease including zoonoses.
- 8.41 Rider registration forms must be completed and regularly updated, including emergency contact details and relevant client health conditions.

## Accidents

- 8.42 Horse riding is a dangerous sport. The inspector should make sure that the proprietor and staff are aware of the associated dangers.
- 8.43 The accident record book may be examined, signed, and dated by the inspector.
- 8.44 Although the inspector is not an expert on human safety, they should advise the local authority on any weaknesses detected in this area.

## Personal protective equipment (PPE)

- 8.45 All equipment provided to clients must be in good, safe condition, and be available for inspection.
- 8.46 The availability of riding hats should be ascertained, and their overall appearance should be assessed. Riding hats must always meet the current required health and safety standards and be worn when mounted.
- 8.47 Any riding hats provided must be stored, clean, and fit for purpose, with clearly documented records of regular safety checks. Any further examination of hats and other riding apparel is a health and safety issue and is the joint responsibility of the proprietor of the riding establishment and the local authority.
- 8.48 The inspector is not equipped to detect fine cracks in the hat's structure which may render it unserviceable, and on this basis should not give the impression that hats have "passed" the inspection.
- 8.49 A written procedure must be available and implemented for the safe use of riding wear where horses are used on public roads and spaces, including:
  - a. Riding hats;
  - b. Riding boots;
  - c. Gloves;
  - d. Body protectors; and
  - e. High visibility clothing.
- 8.50 It must be mandatory that riding hats are worn at all times when mounted.

## Part 9: Staff

- 9.1 The inspector and local authority must be satisfied that the licence holder has the appropriate qualification or sufficient experience to be granted a licence.
- 9.2 The Regulations state that sufficient numbers of people who are competent for the purpose must be available to provide a level of care that ensures the welfare needs of all the animals are met.
- 9.3 In assessing staffing levels, the inspector must take into account:
  - a. the size of the premises;
  - b. the number of horses stabled or at grass;
  - c. the qualifications or experience of the staff; and
  - d. the use of voluntary or part-time staff.
- 9.4 The licence holder or designated manager and staff employed to care for the animals on a daily basis must have competence and experience to identify normal horse behaviour. They must be able to recognise and take appropriate measures to prevent or mitigate pain, suffering, injury, disease, or abnormal behaviour.
- 9.5 Staff or at least one member of staff must have a recognised qualification, such as the relevant OFQUAL regulated level 3 qualification and/or suitable experience/training, such as having run an equine establishment before.
- 9.6 Suitable and sufficient training of staff must be demonstrated to have been carried out, with relevant records of induction in the following areas:
  - a. Animal welfare including recognising poor welfare;
  - b. Animal handling;
  - c. Cleanliness and hygiene;
  - d. Feeding and food preparation;
  - e. Disease control and prevention; and
  - f. Recognition and first aid treatment of sick and injured animals.
- 9.7 The licence holder must provide or ensure the implementation of a written training policy for all staff, which must be reviewed and updated on an annual basis and may include the use of online courses.
- 9.8 There must be an annual appraisal for staff, with knowledge gaps being recognised and remedied.
- 9.9 If no staff are employed, the licence holder must demonstrate their own knowledge development.
- 9.10 Schedule 5, paragraphs 3 (1) & (2) of the Regulations require that the activity must not at any time be left in the charge of a person aged under 18 years. This would include management and dealing with clients.
- 9.11 No horse may be hired out except under the supervision of a person aged 16 years or older, unless the licence holder is satisfied that the person riding the horse is competent to ride without supervision.

## Part 10: Variations of premises and special considerations

- 10.1 Apart from the standard riding school premises, other centres of horse activity which come within the scope of the Regulations include:
- a. Trail Riding - guided and unguided riding Schools with attached trekking riding schools with livery;
  - b. Centres requiring an adventure activity licence;
  - c. Centres and individuals hiring hunters and hacks;
  - d. Centres teaching polo using hired horses;
  - e. Pony parties, where ponies are being hired for riding or for use in providing instruction in riding for payment; and
  - f. Beach ponies and donkeys.
- 10.2 These establishments should normally be inspected during their operating season and should comply with the normal requirements of the Regulations in so far as these are reasonable and applicable. Where it is impossible to inspect all premises, a representative sample must be inspected.
- 10.3 It is important to give the local authority a concise idea of how the centre operates, and to consider whether the operators are competent to run what may be extensive riding, where control of the health and safety of the rider and horse may be from a distance.
- 10.4 In these cases, it is useful to see a risk assessment of the centre that will give the inspector some idea of how things are run.

### Trekking centres

- 10.5 As a general rule, horses and ponies in purely trekking centres are so used to the pattern and familiarity of rides that the inexperienced rider can rely on the horse to carry them safely.

### Hacking

- 10.6 Hacking is the next stage upwards in horsemanship from conventional lessons or trekking, where the rider is expected to be able to control the horse competently and independently.
- 10.7 The inspector must be satisfied that the operator is able to gauge the skill level of the rider for the appropriate horse.

### Trail riding

- 10.8 Trail riding horses travel over greater distances than the previous two types of operation, often staying away overnight, and may cover 80-100 miles in a week. This requires a more skilled rider, and better supervision by the operator, especially with regard to accidents and emergencies.
- 10.9 Any horse that becomes lame or sick is normally replaced under the supervision of the operator during the trail ride, and provision for this must be made.
- 10.10 The horses can find this type of work physically demanding and distances over 12-15 miles per day can cause issues, particularly for young horses. Most centres offering this type of riding will

give the horse one week off for every week on.

- 10.11 The most adventurous of this type is unguided, with the rider left to their own devices with maps and a rendezvous. It is essential that the inspector is satisfied that adequate control and management is in place to cover any eventuality. For example, all riders are checked in at night by phone, and the overnight stays allow for the checking of the horses.

#### **Riding school with attached trekking**

- 10.12 Where there is a riding school with attached trekking, the inspector must be clear about which horses are used for each type of function.

#### **Riding schools with attached livery**

- 10.13 Where there is a riding school with attached livery, there shall be a clear distinction of premises between the hired-out horse and those at livery.
- 10.14 In the case of a "DIY" livery, a separate feed, tack, and other facilities is preferable.
- 10.15 The inspector is authorised to inspect all animals on a premises for which a licence is requested, not merely those used in the riding school.

#### **Centres requiring Adventure Activity Licence Association (AALA) licences**

- 10.16 These licences apply to centres offering activities to under 18-year-olds. The licence is given after inspection by the AALA and generally applies to trekking centres where the horses are taken well away from main roads (over 30 minutes travelling time from the nearest road or refuge) and at certain heights of mountain (above 600 metres). It does not strictly apply to all centres, but many riding establishments get this licence if they are dealing with school children.
- 10.17 Providers of pony trekking have to show their instructor/leaders are competent to deal with risks arising from being in rugged and remote country, as well as the use of horses.
- 10.18 The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) was designated as Adventure Activities Licensing Authority (AALA) from 1 April 2007. There is more detailed guidance on the Adventure Activities Licensing Regulations 2004, on the HSE's website here: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/aala/>

#### **Polo centres or other centres hiring horses**

- 10.19 Riding establishments teaching polo on hired ponies must ensure compliance with the provisions in the Regulations and ensure the ponies are suitable for this specific purpose. Similar considerations apply to centres hiring hunters and hacks.

#### **Pony parties**

- 10.20 Ponies used for pony parties should be inspected in the usual way and the inspection should take place where the ponies are kept, which may be at a livery yard. Inspectors should check the arrangements for transporting the ponies.
- 10.21 The suitability of the persons to run such a business may pose practical problems. The inspector should consider the suitability of the applicant in the usual way and as outlined above.

## Part 11: Summary of offences

### England

- 11.1 It is an offence under the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018:
- a. To breach a licence condition;
  - b. To fail to assist in the taking of samples from animals;
  - c. To intentionally obstruct an inspector in the exercise of their powers of entry or inspection;
  - d. To use in a riding establishment any horse under three years old, or any mare heavy in foal, or a mare whose foal has not yet been weaned;
  - e. To hire out any horse which, due to its condition, its use would be likely to cause it to suffer;
  - f. To fail to provide veterinary attention for a sick or injured horse used in a riding establishment;
  - g. To supply riding equipment, which is not in a good and safe condition.
- 11.2 Concerns about individuals illegally operating riding establishments should be referred to the relevant local authority or trading standards office in the first instance. The RCVS does not have authority to investigate or prosecute these offences, but will assist the enforcement authorities with investigations, as appropriate.

## Part 12: Other relevant legislation and guidance

- 12.1 In addition to the Regulations, inspectors should be aware of other legislation relevant to their work in this area. This includes current animal welfare legislation, which requires those with responsibility for animals to care for them properly and imposes a duty of care on them to take reasonable steps to ensure that their animal's welfare needs are met.
- 12.2 The Animal Welfare Act 2006 defines who is considered to be responsible for an animal.
- 12.3 The law is clear that a person becomes responsible for an animal by virtue of ownership or where they can be said to have assumed responsibility for its day-to-day care. This includes those who assume responsibility for the animal on a temporary basis, for example, keepers and carers such as an owner's friends, neighbours and relatives, and staff at livery yards.
- 12.4 Those responsible for animals are required to provide for the following five basic welfare needs:
- a. A suitable environment;
  - b. A suitable diet;
  - c. The ability to exhibit normal behaviour patterns;
  - d. Housed with, or apart from, other animals; and
  - e. Protection from pain, suffering, injury and disease.
- 12.5 This means that people such as owners, keepers, and carers may commit an offence if they do not take reasonable steps to ensure these welfare needs are met. They may also commit an offence if an act, or failure to act, causes an animal to suffer unnecessarily.
- 12.6 Guidance on how these needs might be met is included in the [Code of practice for the welfare of horses, ponies, donkeys and their hybrids](#) issued by DEFRA.
- 12.7 Further advice is contained in the compendium published by the National Equine Welfare Council and [is available here](#).
- 12.8 Inspectors must also comply with their professional responsibilities set out in the RCVS [Code of Professional Conduct for Veterinary Surgeons](#). The [supporting guidance](#) provides further advice on the acceptable standards of professional practise.



## Part 13: Inspecting polo establishments

- 13.1 In some cases, inspectors may be asked by local authorities to conduct inspections of polo establishments where horses are being let out on hire for riding or polo lessons, or for use in providing instruction in riding for payment, or both.
- 13.2 The Hurlingham Polo Association (HPA) governs the sport of polo in the UK. Polo clubs and their players are members and pay an annual fee. Whilst ponies might be hired by HPA members for any polo activity including lessons, not all are, and you do not need to be an HPA member to play polo within a polo school or academy.
- 13.3 The majority of licensed establishments will conduct their business at or will be affiliated to one of the member clubs.
- 13.4 Inspectors should follow the guidance in these guidelines as they explains how the Regulations apply. However, the Association of Polo Schools and Pony Hirers (APSPH) has produced some general information on how polo establishments operate, to assist inspectors with their inspections. The is attached at Annex D.

## Annex A: Higher standards

1. There are eight required higher standards and five optional higher standards.
2. To qualify as meeting higher standards, a riding establishment needs to achieve all the required higher standards as well as 50% of the optional higher standards.

### Required

1. There must be an option for a permanent individual turnout paddock or pen. This will give horses their own area for grazing or turnout if needed because of ill-health or domination by other horses.
2. Horses must be inspected at least once out of hours, for example between 6pm and 8am.
3. All horses must have a structured management and care programme to include their exercise needs. It should include suitable alternatives for those not able to exercise, such as extra grooming or physiotherapy.
4. Each horse will have its own specific care plan detailing their age and any health related conditions.
5. Records must show individual monitoring and training plans for horses with training needs to improve their use within a riding school. This must be accompanied with evidence of regular and effective checks with the saddler for comfort and fit.
6. Initial assessments must be carried out for new riders. The details of the assessment must be recorded.
7. A documented risk assessment must be available for all equipment. Examples include: horse clippers; horse walker; yard blowers; arena levelling equipment; any extra therapy-based machines or equipment
8. A documented risk assessment must be available for activities, including Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) needs. It must include the need for PPE for different tasks and situations.

### Optional

1. There must be a separate secure, clean and well-lit veterinary inspection area for safe access to inspect a horse.
2. There must be separate well lit, lockable, purpose-built feed room with water available and additional storage for supplements.
3. A competent person must be on site at all times.
4. Records must show individual health plans and monitoring of the dietary needs of horses. Monthly body condition scoring must be recorded - if is not optimum, advice must be sought from a vet or expert equine nutritionist. This advice must be documented.
5. There must be a legible and up to date feed chart on display. It must show the correct feeding amounts for individual horses.

## Annex B: Inspection of working donkey premises

1. Inspectors will be asked by local authorities to inspect premises where working donkeys are used. Inspecting donkeys will be more likely for those working in coastal areas, but there is increased number of inland donkey riding businesses across the UK. The advice in this section has been formulated in conjunction with the Donkey Sanctuary.
2. Traditionally, donkeys have been used to offer beach rides to tourists all around our coastline, with Blackpool in particular having the highest number to be found in one place. There are still significant numbers of working donkeys in the UK. An inspector may be called upon by the local authority to complete the annual inspection of licensed riding establishments in their locality including those working the beach, and other donkey riding operators.
3. Operators are now commonly diversifying into a range of events such as donkey derbies, Christmas markets, residential homes, and firework displays for example, and as such, donkeys can be found working in various locations such as racecourses, inner cities, housing estates, and shopping centres. Donkey riding establishments should be inspected with the same care and attention given to horse riding establishments and are licenced under the same Regulations. The riding of donkeys, is covered by the 'hiring of horses' section, with specific conditions set out in Schedule 5. In addition to ridden activities these new regulations now require those 'keeping or training animals for the purpose of exhibition' to also be licensed. Specific conditions are set out in Schedule 7. This change will capture those used for non-ridden activities such as children's parties, grooming days, painting parties, house visits, petting zoos, travelling farms etc.
4. Donkeys show behavioural, physical, and medical variations from the horse. More information on donkeys in general can be found on [The Donkey Sanctuary's website, under 'Donkey Care'](#).

### Multiple premises

5. A common welfare issue is the care and housing for working animals out-of-season or out of work, particularly as some donkeys overwinter at an alternative address, for example a foster home, which may be in a different local authority. The licensing authority should inspect the donkeys' accommodation, grazing, and working environment where at all practical. Temporary carers should also qualify as competent persons.
6. The location where working days are spent should provide shelter from the elements and access to water and feed. The main housing where evenings and rest days are spent should be inspected by the same standards as every riding establishment despite often being of different construction to the standard single stable. Any other locations used throughout the year should be listed on the form.
7. The premises are more likely to house the donkeys as groups in barns. As long as they conform to the same standards of space, hygiene, safety, ventilation, and fire prevention then they can be deemed fit for purpose.

### Inspecting donkeys out of season

8. Inspectors should plan the timing of inspection to be close to, but no later than, the start of the working season where appropriate, i.e. beach donkeys often start early Spring. However, this means that the conditions to bear in mind are those which could affect the donkey's work in the future. Key issues to look out for are:

- a. Respiratory disease due to lack of exertion can present late or not at all. Often donkeys are transported to their place of work by vehicle, and this can cause problems if their breathing is compromised, especially in hot weather.
- b. Hoof conformation as donkeys often do not have the same quality trimming as horses. Inexperienced foot trimmers can be confused by the upright, boxy hoof and, therefore, imbalance can be exacerbated. Hooves should be trimmed every six-to-eight weeks by a qualified farrier.
- d. Body condition – a thick coat can hide a skinny body underneath. Hands-on body condition scoring is important, and ribs should be felt under light pressure. A common welfare issue is obesity; this is because the donkey requires less energy.
- e. Dental health – same as horses, donkeys require at least annual dentals; recommended to be performed by a qualified equine dental technician or veterinary surgeon.
- f. Skin - Sores and lice may not also be apparent so a thorough skin check is required, especially in the girth area. A full body check for sarcoids should be carried out as they can be hidden by the thick coat. Access to solid shelter, for the purposes of welfare is viewed as an essential requirement according to the Code of Practice. This should be taken into account as the donkey's coat is less waterproof.

### Soundness

- 9. Making a donkey “trot-up” can be tricky. Inspectors should attempt a walk and trot, away and towards them, on a hard level surface. In a letter to the owner before the inspection, request a hard, level surface to trot up and able bodies to assist. Donkeys often respond better to persuasion from behind than pulling from in front. Inspectors should not allow the owner to trot the donkeys up in a group as lameness can then be hidden. If an examination of walk and trot is not possible, the inspector should make a note of this in the accompanying letter to the inspection report.

### Condition scoring

- 10. For guidance on condition scoring, see [The Donkey Sanctuary website](#).

### Identification

- 11. Inspectors should ensure that all donkeys to be worked are inspected and all donkeys on the premises are listed. Bring a microchip scanner to check identification. Each donkey's age should also be checked against the passport to ensure compliance with the Regulations and to aid in identification.

### Vaccination and worming

- 12. Owners are recommended to do these but it's often not the case. The products used and vaccination schedules are the same as for horses.

### Tack

- 13. The same safety principles apply. The narrow chest and short thorax of a donkey make saddle fitting difficult so inspectors should check the girth, withers, and back for soreness. Each saddle should be matched to a named animal and the rules of saddle fit are the same. Each piece of tack should be checked for soundness and condition. Hard hats should also be available and inspected.

## Foot care

14. The Donkey Sanctuary recommends the use of a qualified, registered farrier, ideally with donkey experience, every 6-10 weeks. Often the beach operators will trim the hooves themselves so attention should be paid to hoof balance, toe length, and heel height. The donkey hoof is more upright and boxy and conformation differences can result in medio-lateral imbalances. They are also susceptible to moisture uptake. Hard standing should be provided to prevent conditions such as thrush and seedy toe.

## Other advice

15. When assessing the fitness of donkeys to work, inspectors should bear in mind the intended use of the donkeys which can vary in terms of exertion, frequency, and environmental conditions; donkeys deserve the same welfare standard as horses.
16. For specific advice about donkeys please feel free to contact the Donkey Sanctuary's Veterinary Department on 01395 579162 or [vets@thedonkeysanctuary.org.uk](mailto:vets@thedonkeysanctuary.org.uk).

## Frequently asked questions

### ***What if there is nowhere dark to perform an ophthalmological examination?***

Try using a coat to provide a dark environment but if it is not sufficient then make a note in the accompanying letter. It is worth sending a letter prior to the inspection that a darkened area is required.

### ***Which parts of the premises should I inspect?***

This is a complicated issue with many grey areas. The donkey's site of work is normally remote to their housing. The location where working days are spent should provide shelter from the elements, donkeys have a greater need for protection from rain and wind compared with horses. Donkeys require frequent (at least every four hours) access to water and forage. The main housing where evenings and rest days are spent should be inspected by the same standards as every riding establishment despite rarely being standard single stabling. Any other locations used throughout the year should be listed on the form.

## **Annex C: APSPH guidelines for inspecting polo establishments**

### **Suggested guidelines for inspecting polo establishments from The Association of Polo Schools and Pony Hirers**

1. We expect all the rules and regulations outlined below, to be maintained by members and potential members of the APSPH.
2. The Hurlingham Polo Association (HPA) governs the sport of Polo in the UK. Polo clubs and their players are members and pay an annual fee.
3. Whilst ponies might be hired by HPA members for any polo activity including lessons, not all are and you do not need to be an HPA member to play polo within a polo school or academy.
4. The majority of licensed establishments will conduct their business at or will be affiliated to one of the member clubs and have their ponies' passports issued or over-stamped by the HPA.

### **TACK FOR POLO**

NB. The HPA's regulations do not specify all the different kinds of tack used for polo.

#### **Leg protection**

5. As the regulations demand for competitive polo, ponies must have lower leg protection on all four legs. Many providers will, for low level beginner lessons only, use front leg protection. However, some may choose to have a full set of bandages on all four legs plus over reach boots in addition.

#### **Tack**

6. Polo ponies would normally be ridden in a polo saddle which differs from other saddles in various ways.
7. Polo Saddles don't have knee rolls and have very little under the main saddle flaps, this is perfectly normal. Girths may or may not have covers and some may have Argentine style cinch girths. Some polo saddles will also not have the English style metal stirrup clips but fixed stirrups. Most stirrup leathers are made from thick buffalo leather and the stirrups are large and wide. It is very rare to see safety stirrups in polo however, some will have rubber treads. All polo ponies will be ridden with breast plates and over girths, however, neither are compulsory but both are recommended.
8. Polo bridles are normally Gags or Pelhams of varying types. All ponies will be played in a standing Martingale. There are no current HPA rules about what you can use, other than about the mouth piece size and length of shank for bits or any tack that inhibits the pony's vision.
9. Some establishments won't have individual tack for each pony, as it is an acceptable practice in polo to share.

### **HOUSING OF POLO PONIES**

10. Not all polo ponies are kept in stables, some will live in paddocks. This is an acceptable practice in polo. Whilst it is accepted that it is a requirement to have at least one isolation box, not all yards will have access to stables to match the number of ponies they own or run.

## **CHANGING OF POLO PONIES BETWEEN SEASONS**

11. Many establishments will have two strings of ponies or more ponies than they have listed on their license. They may choose to swap ponies over at the end of the summer season or at the end of the arena season. Some establishments rotate their ponies in and out of work throughout the year. Older, less able ponies or those with leg issues may be semi-retired to play the arena season, as it is less of a strain on them.
12. When establishments go through their license inspections there may be ponies that are fatter and unfit, with long manes and not shoes. These ponies will probably be used for the following season. It is acceptable to turn out ponies for long periods of time in between seasons.

## **ONSITE AND OFFSITE ACTIVITIES**

13. Polo doesn't always need access to an arena, in the summer polo is played on grass fields. In the winter, polo is played in an arena however many establishments won't have their own facilities for both or either season so their ponies will be trucked from the licensed site to another location. In these scenarios, their risk assessments must take into account offsite hires and activities at different club locations.
14. These offsite activities will also mean that they will need to travel with a vet kit, buckets and general equipment to the offsite location.

## **WORKLOAD**

15. Some ponies will only be used for lessons, some for all levels and some for isolated levels. Some ponies will be used for only one season, either grass or arena and some will do both. The rules set by the HPA and SUPA differ as to how many chukkas a pony can do in one day. There is no current limit set for the number of lessons or a maximum amount of time a pony can be used for. Currently, it is up to the discretion of the establishment.

## **SUITABLE PONIES**

16. There is a huge range in the type of ponies used in polo schools. Some will be specifically sought for polo schools, whilst others have had a full polo career and are retired to teaching lives.
17. You may expect to see ponies of a more mature age in polo establishments. Many establishments will have ponies on all levels for players beginning to learn to play and for professional players. Some ponies will be capable of both but most will do one or the other.
18. Reputation is everything in polo and if clients, schools or companies that hire ponies find a supplier with ponies that are not suitable to be ride, then word gets around. Umpires, match officials and polo clubs also have a duty to prevent dangerous or lame ponies from playing polo.

## **PAPERWORK**

### **Risk Assessments**

19. Risk assessments should cover onsite, offsite, travel to and from activities. Risk assessments for employees, contractors and suppliers, horses, clients including Child Protection.

### **Policies**

20. First Aid, Fire Protection, Child Protection, Health and Safety and Welfare.

## **Reporting of Accidents**

21. Accident report record book and RIDDOR procedures etc

## **THE HURLINGHAM POLO ASSOCIATION RULES AND REGULATIONS REGARDING PONIES AND PONY WELFARE**

For information to assist inspectors, follow the link :

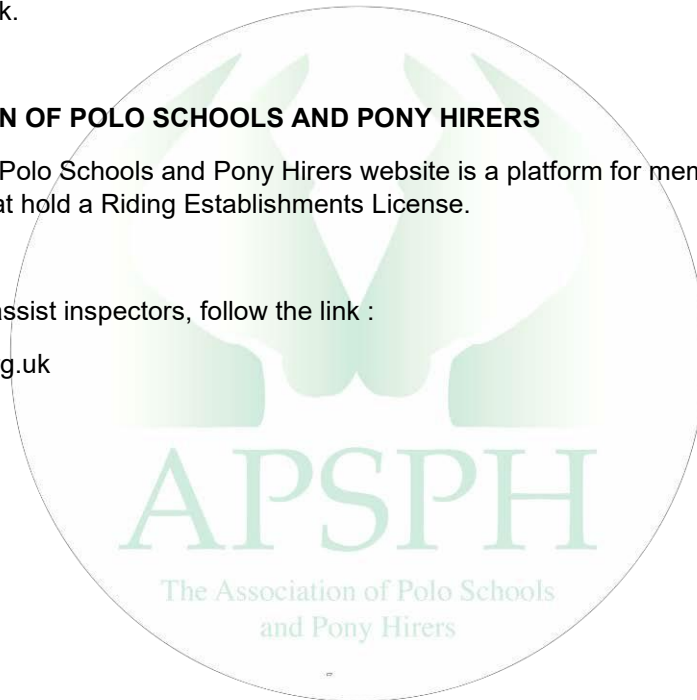
[www.hpa-polo.co.uk](http://www.hpa-polo.co.uk).

## **THE ASSOCIATION OF POLO SCHOOLS AND PONY HIRERS**

The Association of Polo Schools and Pony Hirers website is a platform for member polo schools and polo pony hirers that hold a Riding Establishments License.

For information to assist inspectors, follow the link :

[www.apsph-polo.org.uk](http://www.apsph-polo.org.uk)





## **Annex D: Biosecurity plan**

1. This Annex aims to provide inspectors with guidance on issues that must be dealt with in a riding establishment's biosecurity plan. The requirement for this plan is specified in Schedule 2, condition 9.3 of the Defra Guidance and must be agreed with a veterinary surgeon.
2. Biosecurity measures and protocols must be in place to:
  - a. prevent the introduction of infectious diseases onto a yard;
  - b. prevent the spread of infectious disease to other horses on the yard; and
  - c. prevent infectious disease being spread to other premises.
3. It is important that all personnel are aware of the riding establishment's biosecurity plan and its implementation should be routine within the daily yard management.
4. The biosecurity plan should include consideration of at least the following five issues:

### **4.1 New arrivals protocol**

- a. New horses brought onto the yard are the most likely route for the introduction of disease, including horses returning to the yard from competitions or stud.
- b. Vaccination status, worming, isolation periods, and monitoring of new arrivals should be included in the biosecurity plan, as should the cleanliness of transportation.
- c. Visiting horses are a risk to resident horses and a protocol should be in place to minimise contact between them including physical contact or via equipment and communal water supply.

### **4.2 Quarantine**

- a. An isolation facility is required to limit the spread of infectious disease. This may be a stable or field distant from other horses and with minimal personnel or other animals such as dogs and cats accessing the area.
- b. Horses in the isolation facility must have accurate records kept including temperature monitoring and any clinical signs exhibited.
- c. The riding establishment should specify the personnel who have access to the facility and how the horses are managed.

### **4.3 Diagnostic tests and vaccination**

- a. Screening for Strangles for new arrivals, faecal egg counts, and saliva tests (if performed) may be included in the biosecurity plan.
- b. The vaccination policy and worming policy of the riding establishment should be included in the biosecurity plan.

### **4.4 Hygiene**

- a. Good environmental conditions in the stables and the yard reduce the risk of

infection.

- b. The use of effective disinfectants, handwashing, the cleanliness of PPE, feed buckets, and water supply should be dealt with both in day-to-day yard management and in the context of isolation facilities.

#### **4.5 Outbreak control**

- a. When a horse has been identified with clinical signs of infectious disease, the biosecurity plan must specify how the riding establishment will contain and deal with the outbreak.
- b. Veterinary involvement, isolation of affected individuals, monitoring healthy horses, access to the premises, information dissemination, and disinfection should all form part off the biosecurity plan.