

REIN

Riding Establishment Inspectors' Newsletter | *Spring 2026*



MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Update on recent work and what's coming up

Welcome to the 2026 edition of the Riding Establishment Inspectors' Newsletter (REIN), issued on behalf of the Riding Establishments Subcommittee (RESC). The RESC is responsible for ensuring, as far as possible, a consistent and high standard of veterinary inspections of riding establishments in England, Scotland, and Wales.

The RESC is made up of a committed group of collaborative colleagues from both the RCVS and the veterinary profession. We were all shocked and saddened at the sudden passing of our fellow member Rebecca Hamilton-Fletcher BVSc (Hons) MRCVS last June. Rebecca was passionate about the impact of the veterinary role in improving equine welfare whether it was through her work as a veterinary inspector, in clinical practice, or as part of the equestrian community. She was enormous fun to work with as well as being dedicated, innovative, and demonstrating a constant desire to improve equine welfare standards across the board. Many of us in the equine veterinary world owe her a huge debt of

gratitude, not just for her work but also her unfailing support of others. Our thoughts, of course, are with her family and friends. We are incredibly grateful to them for allowing us to continue to use Rebecca's webinars in the RESC Training and Induction Course, for the benefit of the whole Inspectorate. Rebecca, we miss you.

Please read on for useful insight, information about updated template forms, and highlighted areas for improvement. Whilst there is not just one way to effectively inspect a riding establishment, and experience and judgement are crucial, a consistent approach to inspections goes a long way to building confidence in the process and supporting our core aim of good standards of equine welfare.

In other news, we are delighted to be recruiting for a new RESC member - please see further below for more information and please consider applying.

As veterinary professionals, our certification work is rightly trusted and riding establishment inspection report forms, together with related documents, are certificates. To protect the integrity

of the veterinary signature, they must be treated with the same degree of care, skill, and accuracy as other areas of veterinary certification. We are therefore committed to offering further support in this area including via training and induction courses, as well as the resources on the RESC webpage. Public trust in our work and the standards we apply is hard won but crucial to effect any necessary changes to achieve the desired levels of equine welfare in riding establishments.

As always, we welcome your feedback on all and any areas of work carried out by the RESC which can be sent to RESC Secretary, Ky Richardson – k.richardson@rcvs.org.uk.

As ever, I want to express my enormous thanks to the RCVS Team, led this year by Ky, with Chloe, Emma, Bri, Jess, and Prabhjit alongside RESC members Anne, Ben, Caroline, Carolyn, David, and Mark for all their enthusiasm, hard work, and good cheer!

Linda Belton BVSc MRCVS, Chair of the Riding Establishments Subcommittee (RESC)

Recruitment notice

The RCVS and the RESC, both responsible for maintaining the Inspectorate and setting the standards for admission and retention is currently seeking a new RESC member.

The RESC, chaired by RCVS Senior Vice-President, Linda Belton, invites current inspectors to visit the RCVS vacancies webpage to apply. RESC members benefit from a loss of earnings allowance. The current day rate is £366 (subject to change each year). Reasonable subsistence and travel expenses will also be reimbursed.

We are particularly keen to hear from inspectors with experience of the Riding Establishments Act 1964 and the Riding Establishments Act 1970 (Scotland and Wales) but those with experience only of



the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018, are also encouraged to apply.

If you would like further information about what will be involved in the role of RESC member, please call Ky

Richardson, the RESC Secretary for an informal chat on 0207 202 0757 or drop them an email to k.richardson@rcvs.org.uk.

The 2026 RESC Training and Induction Course

The 2026 Training and Induction Course kicks off on 1 May 2026, with the release of the webinar series via the RCVS Academy.

Refreshing inspectors (and new applicants alike) will have until Friday 29 May to watch all mandatory webinars. Please make sure you watch each one right until the end, so your compliance is captured.

Next comes the in-person element of the Course which is mandatory for new applicants and takes place on Tuesday 16 June 2026 at The Horse Trust, Home of Rest for Horses in Buckinghamshire. Refreshing inspectors are strongly encouraged to attend the in-person day but have an alternative option if this is not possible.

The format of the in-person day will change this year, as a result of your helpful feedback; thank you. Practical elements of the day will now make up two-thirds of the agenda, with classroom-based learning making up the final third.

New mandatory pre-reading, primarily of the RESC webpage and associated materials, will be introduced this year, and delegates



should be prepared to be questioned on them during both the practical and classroom based learning on the day. This is to make sure you get the most out of your training and are ready to carry out inspections as soon as you join the Inspectorate!

Refreshing inspectors who cannot make

Inspectorate statistics

There are currently 170 inspectors on the Inspectorate.

In the last 12 months, 12 new inspectors joined, 9 voluntarily left, and one was removed via the audit process by the RESC.

the in-person day can instead choose to complete the 2026 Course by attending one of the following online Course Q&A sessions:

- Scotland and Wales only: Thursday 30 June at 11am – 1pm.
- England only: Thursday 2 July at 2pm – 4pm.
- England, Scotland, and Wales: Tuesday 7 July at 2pm – 4pm.

If you have not already paid to secure your place for the 2026 Course, please do so by emailing registration@rcvs.org.uk by 31 March 2026, to avoid being removed from the Inspectorate.

The 2026 Annual Q&A sessions

We have heard your feedback; thank you. As a result, we have made some changes to our Annual Q&A sessions.

They will now be two hours long, instead of an hour and a half, to allow for time at the end to ask further questions arising from the session. Delegates can also choose to leave after an hour and a half if that is more convenient.

There will also be three sessions instead of two so you can choose whether to attend a session covering England, Scotland, and



Wales together, England only, or Scotland and Wales only. This is subject to change depending on uptake.

The RESC will continue to run the sessions in an interactive format using six pre-circulated questions and breakout rooms for delegate discussion, before returning to the main group for wider discussion. The RESC will then conclude by citing RESC guidelines where possible, or sharing how members individually exercise their judgement, where specific guidelines have not been developed.

Feedback from the 2025 audit

Many thanks to all those who participated in last year's audit – a total of 10 inspectors. Two were re-audits following unsatisfactory inspection reports in 2024, and eight were randomly selected from the Inspectorate.

2025 showed great diversity in work; some inspectors carried out many inspections across a broad range of establishments, whilst others completed few inspections during the audit year.

There were many positives; we were pleased with the level of detail in most of the reports issued to various local authorities. That said, in the interests of learning and improving across the Inspectorate, the following weaknesses are highlighted:

- Some inspectors did not retain copies of their report forms and related documents after sending to the local authority. This impacts the audit process, is not compliant with your professional responsibilities, and may breach your professional indemnity terms. Please see the article on certification further below for more advice.

- Unfortunately, inspectors are still conducting new or renewal inspections (England)

without a suitably qualified local authority officer and without being properly appointed. The RESC strongly recommends that these inspections are carried out in collaboration with local authorities. Where this is not possible, it is paramount that you are properly appointed under the legislation (see article on what 'properly appointed' means further below).

- Many inspectors continue to use their own versions of the forms. The RESC strongly recommends that inspectors use RESC template forms available on the RESC webpage, as they contain all the information you are expected to complete, ensure that you are answering the correct questions, and are more likely to be compliant with your professional responsibilities.

- Inspectors have a professional obligation to remain independent and impartial and to declare conflicts of interest, including when carrying out inspections. Conflicts should generally be avoided but where this is not possible, they must be declared to the local authority using the RESC conflict of interest declaration form – an auditable form.

- Lameness, injured, or otherwise unsuitable horses identified

during an inspection must be formally withdrawn from the riding establishment using the RESC template notice to withdraw horses from the riding establishment until examined by the establishment's own veterinary surgeon and deemed fit to work. Inspectors are encouraged to signpost the establishment's own veterinary surgeon to use the RESC template statement of fitness to return to work.

- In many instances, the RESC schedule of horses inspected form was not completed in full. This could be a potential evidentiary issue for the local authority in any future tribunal action, and it is also not compliant with Principle 6 of the 10 Principles of Certification. All parts of this schedule should be completed during an inspection. If, for some reason, it is not possible to complete a particular section, please strike through.

- Inspectors in Scotland and Wales are typically not issuing covering letters to local authorities. The RESC strongly recommends that all inspectors issue a covering letter with their inspection documents. Covering letters to local authorities should also generally be more detailed.

They should:

- summarise your inspection findings.
- set out your recommendations based on your inspection, the information presented to you, and limited to the welfare related matters you have inspected.
- comment on whether in your opinion:
- the riding establishment meets the minimum standards (England).
- the riding establishment meets any higher standards (England).
- is suitable to be licensed under the REAs (Scotland and Wales)/Regulations (England).
- in relation to renewal inspections only (England), you should also set out clearly any minor failings that in your opinion do not compromise animal welfare but should nevertheless be addressed before the next inspection.

We would like to thank the Inspectorate for their general diligence when carrying out inspections and continuous commitment to equine welfare.

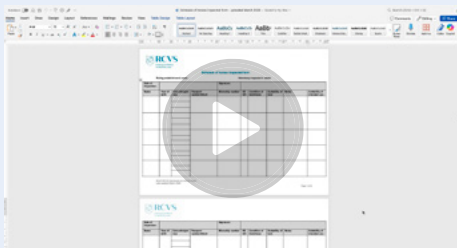
Caroline Foalkes MRCVS, RESC member

The RESC webpage: guidelines and forms update

You may have noticed that the RCVS has a brand-new website. Please don't hesitate to get in touch with the RESC Secretary if you have any feedback or need help accessing the guidelines and forms. We hope the newly restructured RESC webpage continues to efficiently guide you to pertinent information and the available resources.

We have been working very hard behind the scenes to review and update all of our template forms to give them a branding refresh, update hyperlinks, reduce crossover with local authorities, and make them professionally compliant with the Code of Professional Conduct. We are pleased to say that the following updated forms are now published on the RESC webpage under the heading, Inspector guidelines and template forms:

- The schedule of horses inspected form – We've included a brief video to help you extend the table for more equines



and to format it in a way that will avoid corrupted/unusable tables in the future.

- The statement of fitness to return to work
- The riding establishment veterinary inspector report form (England)
- The template form for new horses
- The template notice to withdraw horse(s)
- The veterinary inspector conflict of interest declaration form (hyperlinks only)
- The RESC guidelines (England) (hyperlinks only)
- The RESC guidelines (Scotland and Wales) (hyperlinks only)
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It's important that you download a new

copy and start using these forms as soon as possible, as you may be audited on them. We recommend that you take some time to familiarise yourself with them ahead of your next inspection. You may need to adjust the size of the boxes to suit your preferences and how you use them (printed instead of digitally, for example) but other than that, you can take comfort in the knowledge that by using them, you are likely to be undertaking high quality inspections in the interests of equine welfare.

We will continue to work hard to review and update the remainder of the template forms, as well as the guidelines, and will notify you by email as soon as they are published. If you would like to provide any feedback or make any recommendations about the new forms or the ones yet to be reviewed, please send an email to the RESC Secretary, Ky Richardson – k.richardson@rcvs.org.uk.

Anne Blackburn MRCVS, RESC member

How to ensure you are properly appointed for your inspections in England

Being properly appointed by the local authority before attending to inspect a riding establishment is not just important for the local authority, it is also very important for you, especially when inspecting alone.

Being properly appointed for inspections in England means:

- being granted the necessary powers under the legislation to enter the riding establishment, inspect its records, and take copies.
- preventing the risk of your appointment being challenged in any future enforcement action and/or potentially being the reason the enforcement action fails.
- being protected from civil/criminal liability for any actions taken in good faith during your inspection.

Here's the legislation simplified and organised into the four types of inspections:

1. Initial inspections

- For the granting of a new licence.
- The local authority can choose to appoint a veterinary inspector to inspect with a local authority officer under Part 4(4) of the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018 (Regulations) or alone under Section 51 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and Part 4(2) of the Regulations.
- The RESC strongly recommends that these

inspections are carried out collaboratively by veterinary and local authority inspectors.

- If appointed with a local authority inspector, the RESC riding establishment veterinary inspector's report form should be used, available on the RESC webpage under the heading, Inspector guidelines and template forms.
- If appointed alone:
- The appointment should be made in writing by the appropriate person in the local authority (usually the CEO). This type of appointment cannot be made by a local authority officer.
- Inspectors should use a local authority report form but ensure it is compliant with the 10 Principles of Certification. Inspectors may not be able to certify everything in this form, either because it is not within their own knowledge, or because it falls outside of their experience/competence. A paper trail should be kept in relation to these limitations.

2. Renewal inspections

- These take place at the end of the licence period (one, two, or three years).
- The same guidance as above applies.

3. Annual inspections

- Also referred to as interim inspections or annual (interim) inspections.
- The Regulations state they should take place before the end of the first year and

each year for the duration of the licence, although the first annual inspection commonly takes place around 13/14 months after the licence was granted or renewed.

- Inspectors are appointed to inspect alone under Part 2.8. of the Regulations.
- The RESC annual report form should be used, available on the RESC webpage under the heading, Inspector guidelines and template forms.

4. Mid-licence unannounced visit

- These are carried out only by the local authority, during the term of each licence.

Inspectors are encouraged to check the emails appointing them for a particular inspection and ensure that it includes enough information to satisfy themselves that they are properly appointed and can evidence that in the future. New local authority officers may benefit from your guidance in this respect.

There was no suggestion in the 2025 audit that inspectors were not properly appointed, known as 'authorised', in Scotland and Wales and so this article focuses only on England. Please do however get in touch if you are in any doubt as to what being properly appointed means in Scotland and Wales.

From 2026, emails appointing inspectors will be requested as part of the audit process so please keep copies for your own records.

*Ben Mayes MRCVS and
Carolyn Madgwick, RESC members*

Equine identification and riding establishments



Veterinary surgeons play a central role in encouraging compliance with equine identification (equine ID) regulations and related regulatory requirements, in the interest of safeguarding welfare standards within riding establishments. In practice, equine ID regulations frequently intersect with riding establishment licensing requirements, particularly during routine clinical work and medicines administration provided by an establishment's registered veterinary surgeon, and statutory inspections performed by you as a veterinary inspector.

This article briefly outlines the legal and regulatory framework you should be familiar with in relation to equine ID, i.e., passports/microchipping, and how they intersect with the licensing of riding establishments.

The framework

Equine ID

The Equine Identification (England) Regulations 2018
The Equine Animal (Identification) (Scotland) Regulations 2019
The Equine Identification (Wales) Regulations 2019
The Equine Identification Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2019
Chapter 30, Equines and microchips, of the supporting guidance to the Code of Professional Conduct

Riding establishment licensing

The Riding Establishments Act 1964 amended by The Riding Establishments Act 1970 (REAs)
The Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018 (2018 Regulations)

The Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) Hiring out horses licensing: statutory guidance for local authorities (Defra guidance)
RESC Riding establishment guidelines (Scotland and Wales) (RESC guidelines)
RESC Riding establishment guidelines (England) (RESC guidelines)

Equine ID - Core requirements

Equine owners have a legal obligation to have their equine microchipped and to submit the microchip details to a Passport Issuing Organisation, after which a valid passport will be issued. Passports must accurately describe the horse.

Licence holders in England must then keep a register of all horses kept for the licensable activity on the premises together with each horse's valid passport showing its unique equine life number and a record of its microchip number. Veterinary inspectors are expected to review this during their inspection. No such legal requirement placed on licence holders under the REAs applies in Scotland and Wales.

Veterinary surgeons providing clinical services or inspecting riding establishments have specific legal and professional responsibilities, including verifying identity, checking food chain status, and correctly recording the administration of medicines where required.

Riding establishments – legal and regulatory framework

England

Between 1964 and the introduction of the 2018 Regulations, the REAs applied in England, Scotland and Wales. They introduced

a statutory licensing system for establishments hiring out horses or providing riding instruction. Licences were granted by local authorities subject to conditions aimed at protecting both equine welfare and public safety.

A defining feature was the statutory role of veterinary surgeons. Local authorities were required to consider a veterinary inspection report before granting or renewing a licence, reinforcing the veterinary inspector's role in assessing horse health, suitability for work, and overall welfare.

The 2018 Regulations consolidated licensing in England into a single regime covering activities including hiring out horses and providing riding instruction. Veterinary input however remains central. Inspection findings, including those relating to identification, record-keeping, and fitness for purpose, directly influence licence conditions, duration, and star ratings.

In relation to equine ID specifically, Defra guidance, issued alongside the 2018 Regulations provides detailed support for local authorities and inspectors. While not legislation itself, it does cite some legal requirements alongside guidance, is relied upon in enforcement decisions, and sets clear expectations for compliance. Namely, it specifies that for each horse used in a licensed activity:

"The licence holder must keep a register of all horses kept for the licensable activity...each horse's valid passport showing its unique equine life number and microchip number...The licence holder may be considered the keeper...and has a legal responsibility to make sure that the horse has the correct and up to date identification document."

RESC guidelines are also explicit in terms of what is expected of you as a result of the legal obligation placed on the license holder:

"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."

This guidance makes clear that passport compliance is not merely an administrative task but a core component of welfare assessment and licensing suitability. For veterinary inspectors, they also reinforce the legal and regulatory obligations to verify identity, confirm consistency between the horse and its documentation, and ensure that passport details are accurately reflected in licensing records.

It also reinforces the expectation that passport checks form part of both routine veterinary advisory work and formal inspection processes. Where inconsistencies, missing passports, or inaccurate records are identified, these should be documented and addressed as part of the inspection report form/cover letter to the local authority.

Scotland and Wales

The 1964 REA was amended by the 1970 REA and the REAs together continue to apply in Scotland and Wales.

However, RESC guidelines differ in respect of equine ID in Scotland and Wales, given that the same legal obligations are not placed on licence holders. That said, a reasonable check on compliance is expected and it is worth noting that a veterinary inspector cannot certify that they have inspected a particular horse without confirming its identity personally. This can be done by checking its microchip number, passport, or both. The guidelines state as follows:

"The RE Acts do not require horse passports to be checked. However, the inspector should make reasonable enquiries to satisfy themselves that horses in the riding establishment are in possession of valid passports and make a record of this.

"Inspectors should ensure that all donkeys present are inspected



and listed. If the owner is reliant on a microchip to identify the animals, then it would be advisable to bring a scanner to check identification (in case there isn't one available to you). Each donkey's age should also be checked against the passport to ensure compliance with the RE Acts and to aid in identification."

Practical implications for your inspection

Here is what all of this means for you in practice:

- You should consistently apply RESC guidelines and Defra guidance when reporting on equine ID compliance as part of your inspection.
- You should check passports and microchips against each horse presented for inspection. While this is strictly not expected in Scotland and Wales, it may not be possible to advise it if either are needed for your own identification purposes.
- You should double check relevant information that has been pre-populated on any schedule of horses inspected form as you remain responsible for its accuracy, even if you delegate the scribing to a colleague. This is because this counts as veterinary certification.
- You should advise proprietors on their legal responsibilities as keepers.
- You should encourage prompt rectification of passport or identification deficiencies.
- You should liaise appropriately with local authorities about serious or persistent non-compliance.

By embedding equine ID compliance into the inspection process in England, veterinary inspectors are empowered to play a vital role in protecting equine welfare and supporting legally compliant, well-run riding establishments to meet their obligations under the equine ID Regulations and the riding establishment licensing legislation. It is hoped that similar requirements will be introduced for Scotland and Wales the next time the REAs are reformed.

In conclusion, you operate at the intersection of equine health, identification, and riding establishment regulation. A clear understanding of equine ID, including horse passport/microchipping requirements, and your professional responsibilities set by the RCVS/RESC, is essential for effective inspections, defensible decision-making, and the promotion of high equine welfare standards.

Mark Tabachnik MRCVS, RESC member

FAQs

1. Is there a particular number of staff that should be employed by a riding establishment?

There are no specified ratios for staff to horses in the Regulations, REAs, or RESC riding establishment guidelines.

As such, inspectors should use their experience and professional judgement to assess whether the number of staff is, in their opinion, appropriate to the number of horses and the associated expected workload each day.

2. As a recently qualified inspector, I have struggled to find any inspections to carry out. How might I find such work?

Local authorities/councils tend to either have an inspector they have used for several years and with whom they are content, or they may tender all riding establishment inspections every few years (or some other pre-determined timeframes set internally).

It is always worthwhile contacting local authorities/councils within a reasonable distance from your and making yourself known to them. You can explain, where applicable, that you would be available as an alternative where current inspectors may be conflicted; would like to receive an invitation to tender, where relevant; or you to express your interest should the local authority/council's professional arrangement with their current inspector end.

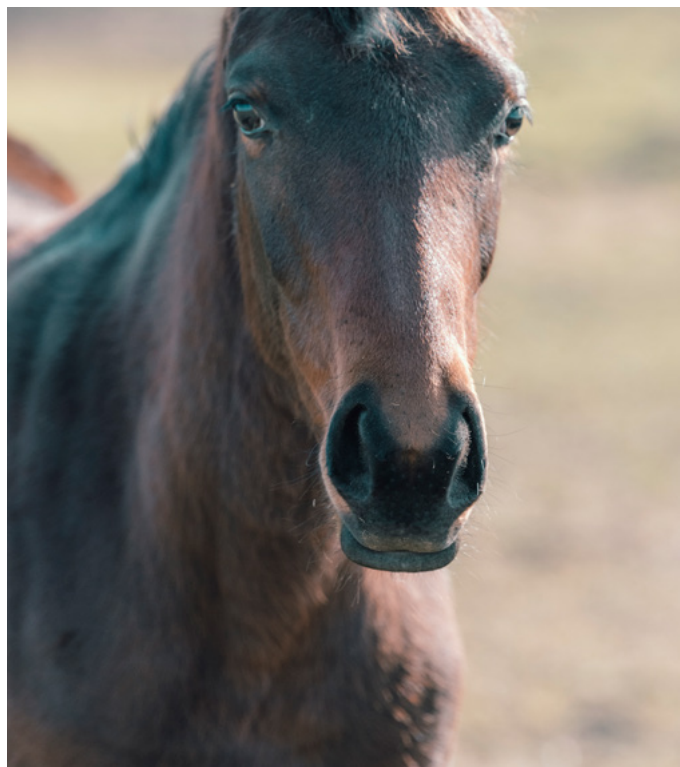
Local authorities/councils are often also looking for veterinary surgeons to inspect in relation to other species, i.e., small animals (for boarding/breeding establishments), or pet shops etc. It may also be useful to set out what other licensing inspection experience you have and might be open to.

3. I have done many inspections where the premises still struggles to have adequate documentation, protocols, and risk assessments in place. Is it acceptable for inspectors to send out a list of what we would expect to see on the day of inspection, a copy of the form we must fill in and complete, and some guidance/help with resources it can access to make sure it has all of this in better shape for the inspection?

England

As part of the local authority inspector training, local authorities are encouraged to provide clear guidance to applicants on the policies, procedures, and records that are required to meet the minimum standards but unfortunately, there is still room for improvement. We will continue to advocate for such improvement when working with local authority stakeholders.

In the meantime, the RESC considers it acceptable for inspectors to provide this information to riding establishments in advance of the inspection. The RCVS has also recently updated the RESC webpage to make it easier to use. There is a specific section for riding establishment owners, including a video explaining the inspection process, and relevant signposting to the forms and guidance veterinary inspectors are expected to follow. It also invites riding establishments to call the RCVS for advice. This may be a useful way of complementing your own efforts in terms of adequately preparing riding establishments for inspection ahead of time.



Scotland and Wales

Fewer protocols/forms/documents are legally required under the REAs, but where they are, for example, fire risk assessments, horse passports, premises notices etc., it is similarly acceptable to set expectations directly with the riding establishment ahead of the inspection. The RESC webpage will also provide some help to riding establishment applicants.

4. What should we do if a riding establishment repeatedly has the same minor failings e.g., paperwork? These riding establishments are often well run, with good standards of welfare, but the owners are "old-school" and so simply don't comprehend the need to keep records or document what they are doing.

England

A veterinary inspector cannot certify by relying on what a riding establishment says it has done and instead can only comment on the evidence provided to suggest it has been done. Therefore, a lack of paperwork may prevent the inspector providing a full opinion to the local authority, which may impact the outcome or require the local authority to fill in the gaps. This should be adequately explained each time minor failings are noted, and of course, reported to the local authority.

It will then be for the local authority licensing inspector to enter into a long-term discussion with the riding establishment to correct those minor failings.

The timeframe for improvements will depend on the issues that are present and inspectors may be asked for their advice on this by the local authority. Please note that 'minor failings' has specific meaning in England, i.e., only those that do not compromise animal welfare.

Scotland and Wales

Examples of low-level failings might include a lack of an adequate worming protocol, poor maintenance of the yard, or no signage. Each issue will present a varying degree of welfare or safety implications which would merit a discussion with the local authority/



council as well as always being included in the report form.

As with England, it will then be for the local authority licensing inspector to enter into a long-term discussion with the riding establishment to correct those low-level failings. The timeframe for improvements should then be based on the potential impact on horse welfare or human safety.

5. What is our role at an inspection if we see acceptable welfare standards in the equines inspected under the legislation, but poor standards of welfare noted in 'other' equines at the establishment?

It is common for a riding establishment to have other groups of horses present such as youngstock, broodmare, liveryes, or older horses.

All horses on the premises may, at the discretion of the veterinary inspector, be inspected under the REAs and Regulations.

The veterinary inspector should describe the issues they see across the entire premises to the local authority, evaluating the welfare of all horses, as there will undoubtedly be cross-over and mixing of stock, which will affect biosecurity and worming plans.

You may also need to advise the local authority of the importance of involving the riding establishment's own veterinary surgeon and in very serious cases, potentially other equine organisations/professionals to work collaboratively to formulate plans to improve overall welfare.

6. Does an establishment run as a charity where horses are utilised and ridden need to be licensed?

Charities are not specifically exempt under the Regulations or REAs.

However, the following do not fall within the scope of the Regulations (England):

- a. Businesses that run pony parties where none of the ponies are ridden.

- 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. That said, 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.

The Regulations also provide an exemption where trading income is less than £1,000 a year.

Advising on the application of relevant exemptions and whether a riding establishment is or is not, falls to the sole responsibility of the local authority. It is however useful for inspectors to be aware of this.

The following do not fall within the definition of keeping a riding establishment in the REAs (Scotland and Wales):

- a. A business premises where the horses employed for the purposes of the business are kept by, or under, the management of the Secretary of State for Defence.
- b. The carrying on of such a business if solely for police purposes.
- c. The carrying on of such a business by the Zoological Society of London or by the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland.
- d. The keeping of horses by universities for the instruction of students on courses qualifying for membership of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons.

David Reed MRCVS, RESC member

Certification and the riding establishment inspector role

Where a veterinary surgeon is required to make a written statement coming from their professional status as a veterinary surgeon, that written statement amounts to a veterinary 'certificate,' even if the word 'certificate' is not used.

Your role as a riding establishment inspector is therefore fundamentally a veterinary certification role and as such, the expectations in Chapter 21, Certification of the supporting guidance to the Code of Professional Conduct should be applied to all report forms, schedule of horses inspected/withdrawn/new horse forms, conflict of interest declarations forms etc.

All template forms provided by the RCVS and the RESC have either recently been updated, or will shortly be updated, to ensure they are fully compliant with the 10 Principles of Certification. It will however remain your responsibility to ensure that all forms used, whether provided by the RCVS/RESC or the local authority, are compliant. You have a key role in helping to maintain the integrity of the veterinary signature. This also applies if you inspect under licensing regulations for other species.

The most applicable veterinary certification principles are summarised below:

Principle 1 – You should certify only those matters which, a) are within your own knowledge, b) can be ascertained by you personally, or c) are the subject of supporting evidence from another veterinary surgeon.

Application to your role – This requires careful use of language. You can certify anything you have seen for yourself, for example, that you have seen the riding establishment licence on clear display at the premises. You cannot however certify that the horses have constant access to water or are inspected in terms of temperature tolerance 'daily' or 'weekly' – unless you are there every day or every week, which is of course unlikely! You could however certify that you have seen daily records of inspections for temperature tolerance, for example.

Because of this principle, you cannot rely on declarations from the riding establishment owner/manager, but you can obtain a relevant declaration from that person to provide to the



local authority alongside your report form as a facilitation exercise.

Principle 2 – You should not, generally speaking, issue a certificate that might raise questions of a possible conflict of interest.

Application to your role – It is acknowledged that it might not always be possible to avoid a conflict of interest when asked to inspect a riding establishment due to the limited number of inspectors. Specific guidance is therefore provided in the RESC guidelines (England) and the RESC guidelines (Scotland and Wales). The Inspectorate was also provided with an update in this respect by email on 5 December 2025, linking to the newly updated conflict of interest declaration form.

Principle 6 – When signing a certificate, you should ensure that no section is left incomplete (you should complete it with care and accuracy and in a manner/using a means which does not lend itself to alteration, or additions, by a second party after it has been issued). It should also include not only your signature but in clear lettering, your name, qualification, and address, and the date on which the certificate was signed and issued.

Application to your role – You will be complying with this principle if you complete your inspection form(s) in full and/or strike out any sections that you have not completed (for example, because you have agreed with the suitably qualified local authority officer that they will inspect that section instead). You will

further comply with this principle if you send a copy of your completed and sign form(s) to the local authority in a format that cannot easily be edited, i.e., handwritten (although digital is preferred for legibility reasons), or a PDF which can't be edited, rather than an editable Word document.

Principle 8 – Your certificate should be clear, concise, copied and retained with all relevant records.

Application to your role – Clear and legible handwriting or digitally typed forms (which are preferred) are likely to comply with this principle. This principle also requires you to keep copies of all report form(s) signed and sent to the local authority, for your records. There may also be record keeping requirements in your professional indemnity terms and conditions. Copies may also be requested by the RCVS and the RESC as part of the audit process. We will typically request copies of your report form(s), schedule of horses inspected form(s), withdrawal and new horses form(s), conflict of interest declaration form(s), and your cover letter summarising your inspection findings to the local authority.

General – Where you certify 'to the best of your knowledge', you should exercise caution and attest only to what genuinely is to the best of your knowledge and belief, true based on the information provided and the observations made during your inspection. If you are in any doubt, do not certify.

Application to your role – If the event has not happened yet, it is not possible to certify that it will, not even 'to the best of your knowledge or belief'. Where you have been provided with information from the riding establishment manager/owner or the local authority officer to inform your professional opinions, you may wish to take certain steps to check the accuracy of that information where possible before certifying, to the 'best of your knowledge or belief'. How certain you are or can possibly be in any given situation will be a matter for your professional judgement.

*Ky Richardson, Senior Standards and Advice Officer/
Solicitor, RESC Secretary*