



The Findings

On The Job Training Survey

For those who are training whilst working with horses: Working Pupils, Working Students and Apprentices.

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1 Introduction

a) About the survey

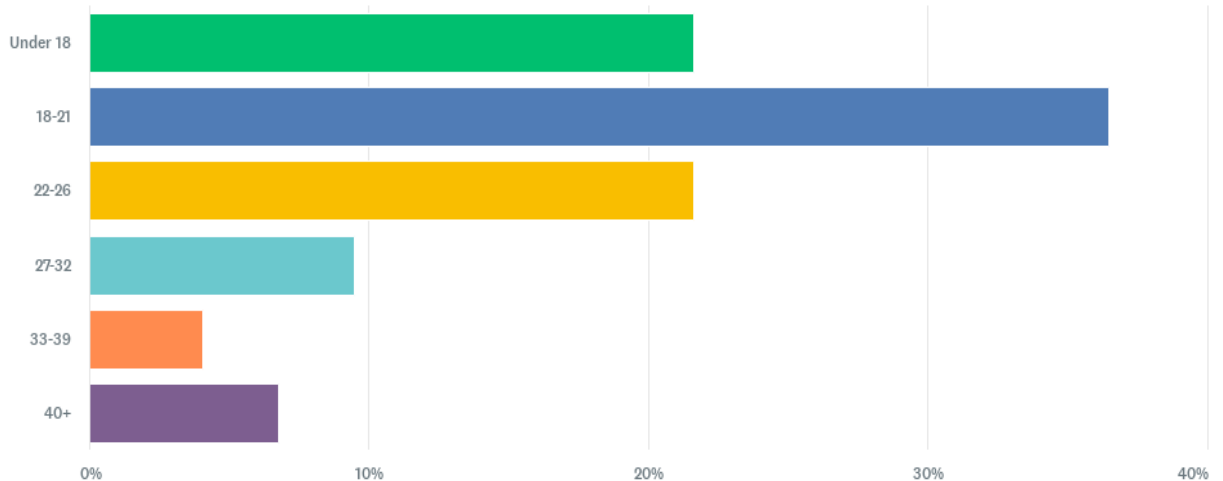
- 1.1 This report presents the findings of an on-the-job training survey conducted by the British Grooms Association (BGA) during June 2026. The survey aimed to gather information about employment status, working hours, pay, access to training, employment rights, and overall job satisfaction among those undertaking roles involving on-the-job training, including working pupils, working students, and apprentices.
- 1.2 The survey also investigated participants' understanding of their employment status regarding:
- Whether they receive the National Minimum Wage or National Living Wage.
 - The amount and quality of training provided.
 - Whether employees believe that their employers meet their legal obligations regarding contracts, holiday pay, sick pay, and other employment benefits.
 - Communication with employers.
 - Accommodation, working hours, and satisfaction with their role.
- 1.3 A total of 75 people took part in the survey. While this is not a statistically representative sample of everyone undertaking on-the-job training in the equestrian industry, the responses provide a valuable snapshot of the experiences being reported by those in these roles.
- 1.4 The majority of responses to the survey came from those:
- Aged under 21 years old.
 - Working in eventing.
 - Who had been in their current role for less than 2 years.
- 1.5 Given the potential vulnerability of young people and the fact that individuals may be reluctant to speak openly about their employment conditions, it is significant that 75 people were willing to share their experiences. The findings should therefore be viewed as an important indication of issues that warrant further attention, rather than as a definitive picture of the entire industry.

b) The British Grooms Association

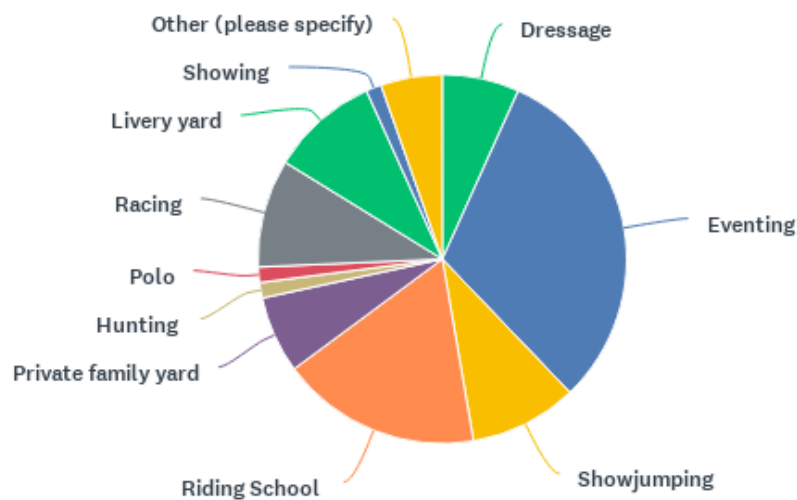
- 1.6 The BGA is the professional association for people who work with horses. It exists to support members throughout their career as a groom, providing support, advice and education to all working in the industry and to speak up on the issues that really matter.

2 Respondent profile

2.1 The majority of those surveyed were under 21 years old – this is not surprising as the survey focused on those receiving on-the-job training – which tends to be a younger demographic.



2.2 Participants were asked about the specific area of the equestrian industry in which they work. The majority of participants worked in eventing, making up a third of the total:

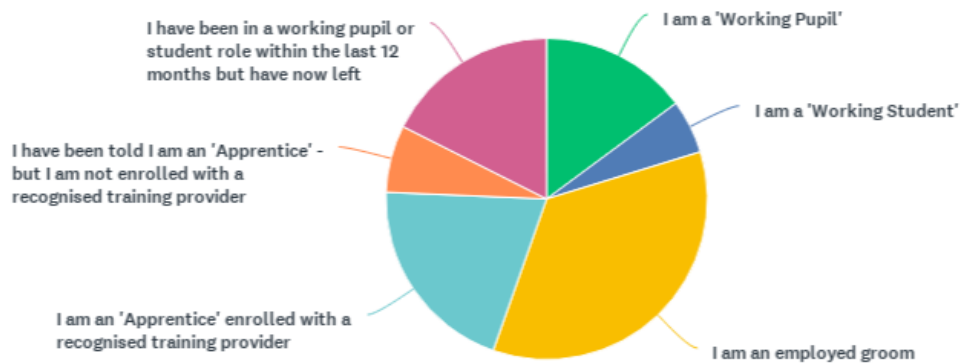


3 Results

a) Type of role

3.1 Participants were asked about how their role would best be described:

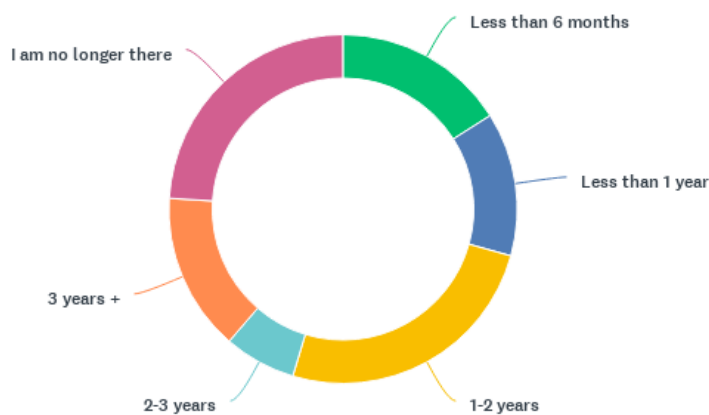
- 15% reported being working pupils.
- 5% described themselves as working students.
- 20% reported being apprentices on recognised apprenticeship schemes.
- 7% described being told they were an apprentice but were not enrolled with a recognised apprenticeship provider.
- 35% stated that they were employed grooms (i.e. they had not been labelled with a job title that would suggest on-the-job training).
- 18% reported that they had been in an on-the-job training type role within the last 12 months but had now left that position.



b) Length of time in role

3.2 Participants were asked how long they had been in their on-the-job training role:

- The majority had been in the role for between 1 and 2 years.
- 15% had been in their role for less than 6 months.
- 14% told us that they had been in the role for less than a year.
- 7% reported having been in their role for between 2 and 3 years.
- 15% told us they had been in their role for 3 or more years.



c) Working hours

3.3 Participants were asked how many hours they work in a week.

- 72% reported working more than 40 hours per week.
- A quarter work between 51 and 60 hours per week.
- And a small number reported working 71 or more hours per week.

3.4 Of those who work 51+ hours per week, only 38% reported having a written contract of employment.

3.5 This finding is significant due to the 48-hour average weekly working time limit imposed by Working Time Regulations, unless the worker has validly opted out of the limit. It suggests that many people working these hours may not have clear written terms explaining their hours, rest entitlements or any working-time opt-out.

3.6 71% of participants under the age of 18 reported working more than 40 hours per week.

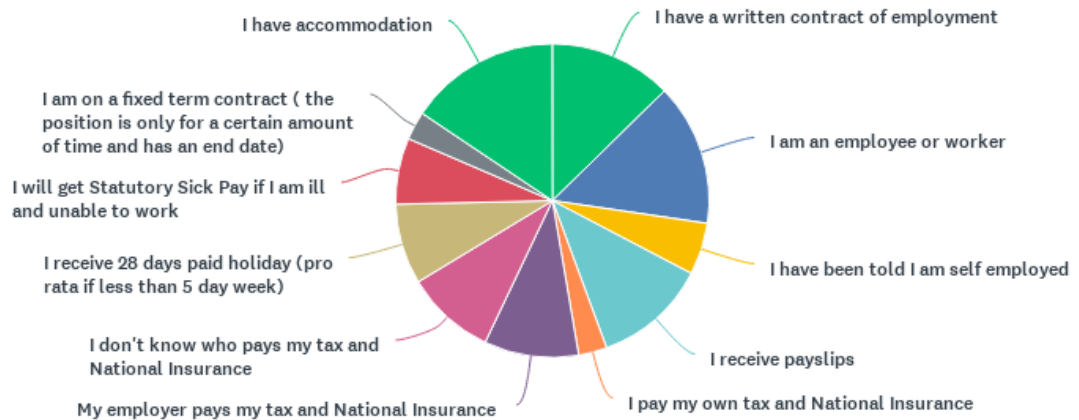
3.7 This finding is particularly concerning, as it suggests that some employers may not be complying with employment regulations for young workers. Long hours in the physically demanding equestrian industry can increase the risk of fatigue, injury, and burnout, and can also negatively affect education and overall well-being.

d) Employment rights

3.8 Participants were asked to provide information about their current position or, if they had left a role within the previous 12 months, their most recent position.

3.9 They were instructed to base their responses on that role, including any on-the-

job training they had received, and they could select all applicable responses to reflect their employment circumstances:



3.10

The results demonstrated:

- 64% **do not** have a written contract.
- 67% **do not** receive payslips.
- 77% **do not** receive their full statutory holiday entitlement.
- Only 20% reported receiving statutory sick pay if they were unable to work.

3.11

The findings suggest that employment practices within on-the-job training roles in the equestrian industry are inconsistent and, in many cases, fall short of expected employment standards.

3.12

15% of participants were told by those they work for that they were self-employed.

This is a significant concern because employment status is determined by the reality of the working relationship, not simply by the label given to it. In most equestrian training roles, individuals work set hours, carry out duties determined by the yard, work under supervision and instruction, and are required to provide their labour personally. They are therefore **unlikely** to be running an independent business.

3.13

Given the nature of equestrian yard work, these factors may indicate employee or worker status rather than genuine self-employment, raising concerns about potential false self-employment and the loss of important employment rights such as National Minimum Wage and paid holiday.

e) Wages

3.14 The National Living Wage (NLW) is the statutory minimum hourly pay for workers aged 21 and over in the UK, while the National Minimum Wage (NMW) sets the minimum hourly pay rates for younger workers and apprentices. Both are designed to protect workers from unfairly low pay and are reviewed regularly by the government.

3.15 Participants were asked whether they were paid for their role and if so, whether they receive statutory minimum pay for every hour they worked:

- More than half reported not being paid at least the statutory minimum wage for their age group.
- 16% of survey participants were **not paid at all** for the work they do.
- Despite this, over three quarters told us that they carry out the same tasks as other staff who are paid for their work.

3.16 Taken together, these findings may indicate widespread concerns about the remuneration of those who receive on-the-job training and raise questions about whether some arrangements appropriately distinguish between employment and training.

f) Training and livery

3.17 Participants were asked whether they had their own horse stabled at their workplace.

- 44% stated that they did.
- 30% reported being charged over £50 per week for livery, and 12% reported being charged more than £110 per week.
- Almost a third said that they did not pay livery for their horse as it is included as part of their role.
- Nearly half of those who had a horse on livery with their employer did not know how much they were paying for this service.

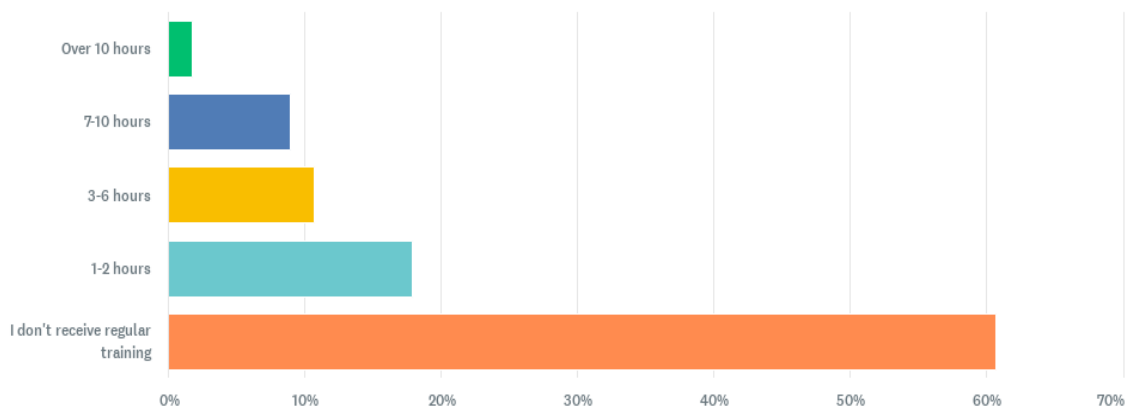
3.18 This suggests a concerning lack of clarity and understanding around livery arrangements.

Livery should not be provided instead of wages. The applicable National Minimum Wage must be paid for all hours that count as working time. Benefits such as horse livery cannot be used to bring cash pay up to the minimum wage.

It is therefore important that the terms of any livery agreement should be confirmed in writing and clearly itemised and invoiced.

3.19 Participants were asked how many hours of training they receive each week.

- 61% told us that they do not receive regular training despite being in an 'on-the-job training' role.
- 18% said they receive between 1 and 2 hours of training per week.
- 99% reported receiving less than 10 hours of training per week, and this included participants who reported being on recognised apprenticeship schemes.



3.20 Participants were asked whether they receive training instead of some, or all of their wages and, if so, how much their training costs.

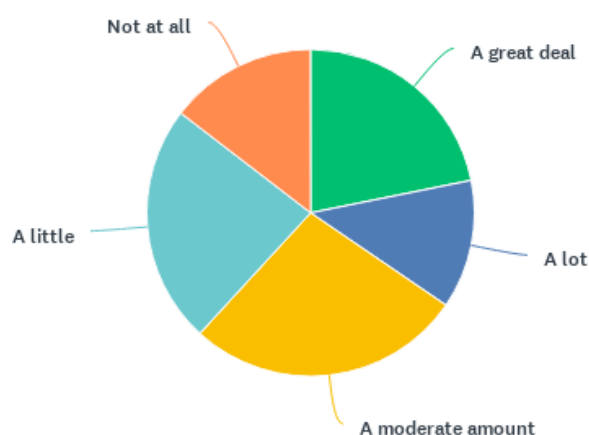
- A third reported receiving training instead of wages.
- 22% did not know how much they were being charged for their training.
- 6% were being charged over £100 per week for training.
- Of those being charged for their training, none reported receiving an invoice for their training costs.

3.21 While employers may legitimately provide training alongside employment, training cannot generally be offered in place of wages, and workers should not bear training costs in a way that causes their pay to fall below the National Minimum Wage.

3.22 To avoid this, employers must not deduct training costs from pay, and workers should be provided with a separate invoice for any training charges payable to their employer. These findings may therefore warrant closer scrutiny by enforcement bodies to determine whether employment and pay arrangements comply with NMW legislation.

3.23 Participants were asked how much they felt on-the-job training had helped them to develop their skills and improve their knowledge:

- 28% felt that their skills and knowledge had improved a moderate amount as a result of the training they had received.
- 22% said that their knowledge and skills had increased a great deal.
- 15% reported no development in their skills or knowledge at all.



3.24 Participants were asked whether they had received all of the training, support and benefits they were promised when they applied for the position.

- Less than a quarter had received everything they were promised.
- 39% received some training and support but not everything they had been told they would.
- **23% had not received any training** or other benefits at all.

3.25 Participants were invited to share their experiences of on-the-job training. This is what they said:

"I received most of what I was promised in the first month or so, then it was only free accommodation and stable space for my horse. I received that instead of being paid actual wages."

"I have not received any training yet, and I'm experiencing severe bullying by the yard owner".

"At the previous trainer I was under, she would constantly promise lessons in exchange for my labour, but she would always be too busy with her 'paying' clients. I was never formally trained in basics such as yard chores or horse care".

"I'm out of the position now, but after the first month or so it was nothing like I was promised. Living was terrible, and I was left half of the time to manage a yard of 12+ horses a day on my own, no pay, long hours and I was scared of the boss".

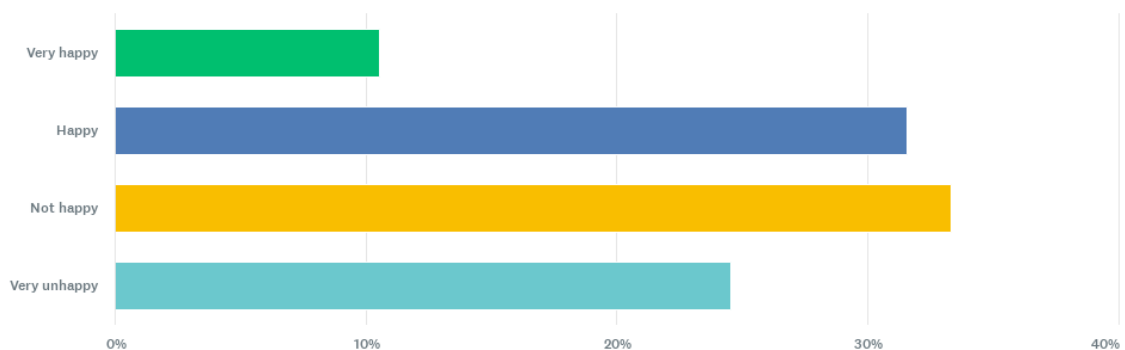
The terms keep changing during my apprenticeship; accommodation costs keep increasing, previously gas was included, and now that's not. Any hours I work above 40, I don't get paid for. I'm told I can't be paid for the overtime because I'm an apprentice.

"Thank you for at least looking into this. I wish I had never become a working student as it has killed my love for horses; I just see mean people now".

g) Workplace wellbeing

3.26 Participants were asked whether they were happy in their job:

- A concerning 58% reported that they were unhappy or very unhappy at work.
- While no workplace can be expected to be perfect, this level of dissatisfaction highlights significant concerns about the working environment and the experiences of those in these roles.



3.27 Participants were asked whether they felt able to talk to their boss about issues at work.

- The majority did not feel able to raise issues with their boss because they were not easy to talk to.
- Almost a third said they were worried about losing their position if they did approach their boss about an issue at work.
- Only 21% felt able to discuss work issues with their boss.

3.28 These findings highlight a particular concern for on-the-job training positions in the equestrian industry, where learning often depends on an open and supportive relationship between the individual and their employer. I

f those undertaking training do not feel able to raise concerns, ask questions or admit when they are struggling, they may miss valuable learning opportunities or allow problems to go unresolved.

4 Conclusion

4.1 The findings of this survey suggest that, while many employers provide valuable opportunities for people entering the equestrian industry, **significant concerns remain regarding the way some on-the-job training roles are structured and managed.**

4.2 Participants reported widespread issues relating to employment status, excessive working hours, low or unpaid wages, limited access to meaningful training, poor awareness of employment rights and low levels of workplace wellbeing.

4.3 Particularly concerning are the findings that **over half of participants reported not receiving at least the statutory National Minimum Wage for every hour worked.**

Most were performing the same duties as employed staff, despite receiving reduced or no pay, and a substantial proportion received little or no regular training despite being recruited into training roles.

4.4 Combined with reports of **excessive working hours, particularly among young workers**, and **poor compliance with basic employment rights such as written contracts, holiday pay, payslips and statutory sick pay**, the results indicate that some employers may not fully understand or comply with current employment legislation.

4.5 Paired with anecdotal evidence provided to the BGA from young grooms and their parents, these findings suggest a concerning lack of awareness about basic employment rights and protections. This is particularly important in the equestrian industry, where young people can be working in inherently hazardous environments involving horses, machinery and long working hours. This lack of awareness risks allowing poor employment practices to continue unchecked and leaves young people particularly vulnerable.

4.6 These practices present significant risks for the equestrian industry. Failure to comply with employment law and National Minimum Wage legislation exposes businesses to financial penalties, reputational damage and enforcement action.

4.7 More importantly, poor employment practices may discourage talented individuals from pursuing long-term careers in the industry, exacerbating existing recruitment and retention challenges and undermining efforts to professionalise the sector.

4.8 The findings also demonstrate the need for greater understanding of the distinction between genuine training and productive work. While high-quality training is an essential investment in the future workforce, it cannot lawfully replace wages when individuals are performing work that paid employees would otherwise perform.

5 The solution

- 5.1 The findings highlight an **urgent need for the equestrian industry to come together to improve standards and understanding around on-the-job training.**

Employers, parents and young people themselves all have a role to play in ensuring they receive proper training alongside the employment rights and protections they are legally entitled to.

- 5.2 **The industry also needs to reconsider the term ‘working pupil’** – a job title does not determine legal employment status. If the reality of the working relationship meets the legal definition of an employee or worker, that is how they will be treated by an Employment Tribunal, regardless of what they are called. The industry must focus less on labels and more on ensuring young people are properly protected and fairly treated.

- 5.3 The BGA continues to work proactively to improve standards across the industry by providing guidance, education and practical support to grooms.

- 5.4 This includes raising awareness of employment rights and responsibilities, promoting best practice in on-the-job training, and providing clear guidance on National Minimum Wage compliance, including when training, accommodation and other benefits can and cannot be taken into account when calculating pay.

- 5.5 The BGA's sister organisation, the Equestrian Employers Association, works closely with employers, training providers and industry organisations to encourage lawful, fair and sustainable employment practices that support both businesses and the long-term development of the equestrian workforce.

- 5.6 Improving compliance with employment legislation, ensuring that training opportunities are genuine and of high quality, and promoting fair pay and good working conditions will be essential if the equestrian industry is to attract, develop and retain the skilled workforce needed for its future success.

- 5.7 Creating a sustainable future for the equestrian workforce requires commitment from both employers and those entering the profession. Those who are unsure about their employment rights, pay or training arrangements are encouraged to seek advice and support from the [British Grooms Association](#), which provides confidential guidance, resources and representation for professional grooms.

- 5.8 Employers who want to ensure their employment practices comply with current legislation and reflect industry best practice are encouraged to access guidance and support through the [Equestrian Employers Association](#). By working together, the industry can improve compliance, raise professional standards and create rewarding, legally compliant careers that attract and retain the skilled workforce on which the sector depends.



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