



**FÉDÉRATION
ÉQUESTRE
INTERNATIONALE**



International Competition Grooms Survey

The Results



The background

The British Grooms Association and Show Grooms International teamed up to produce a survey of international competition grooms.

Despite being an irreplaceable part of equestrian sport, international competition grooms are often underrepresented.

This survey sought to give these grooms a voice and discover which issues are most important to them.

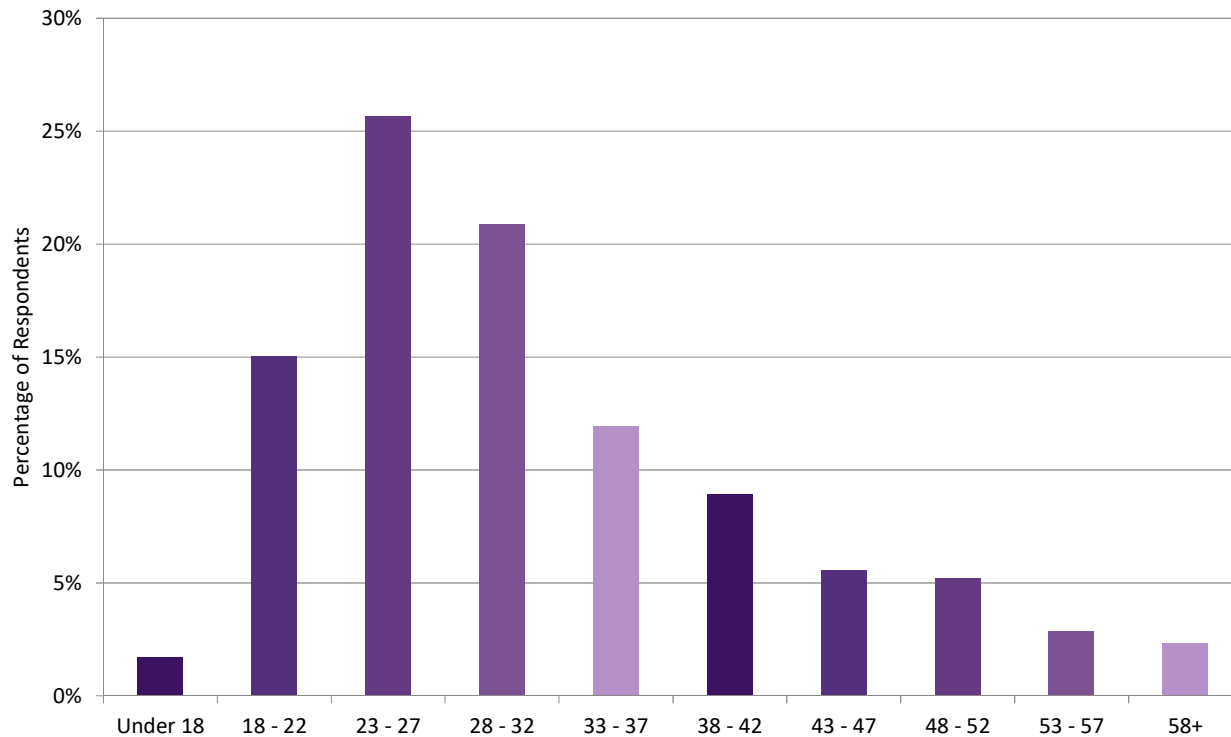
The International Competition Grooms Survey was available for 21 days and was completed by 780 respondents.



The demographics

The first section of the survey sought to explore the various demographics of the respondents such as age, discipline, level of competition that they had groomed at, and employment status.

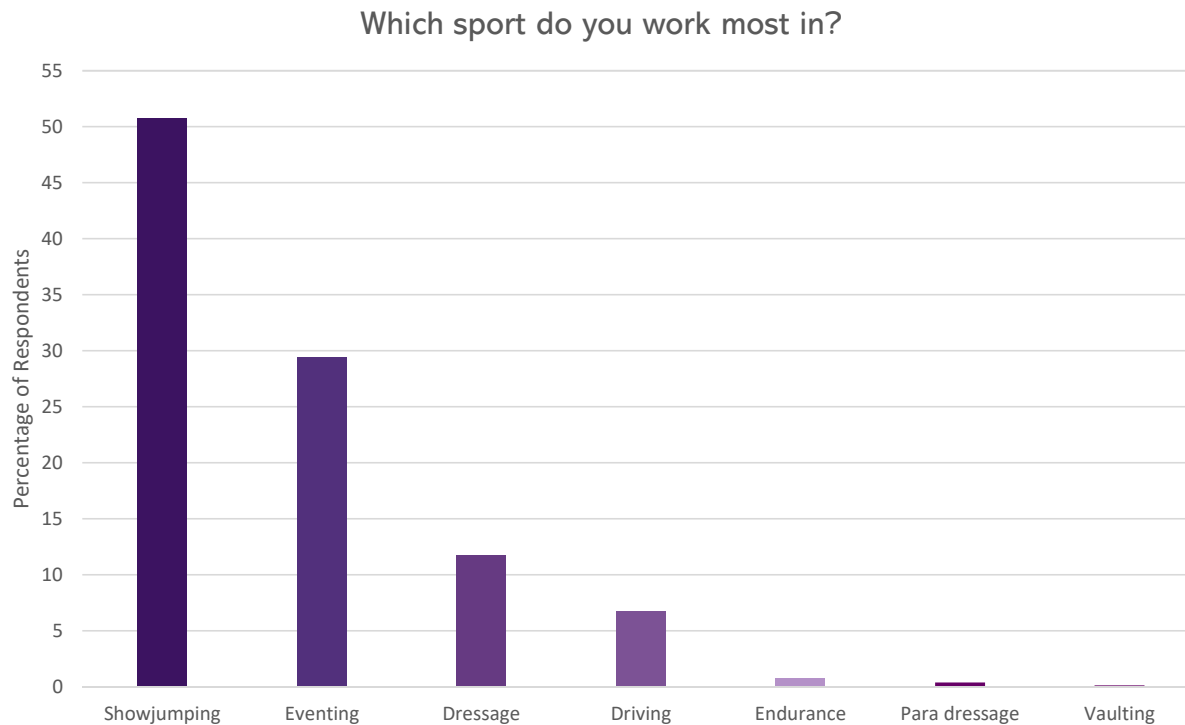
Age



The age of respondents ranged between under 18 to over 58.

The majority of respondents were aged between 23 and 27 years old.

Representation of disciplines

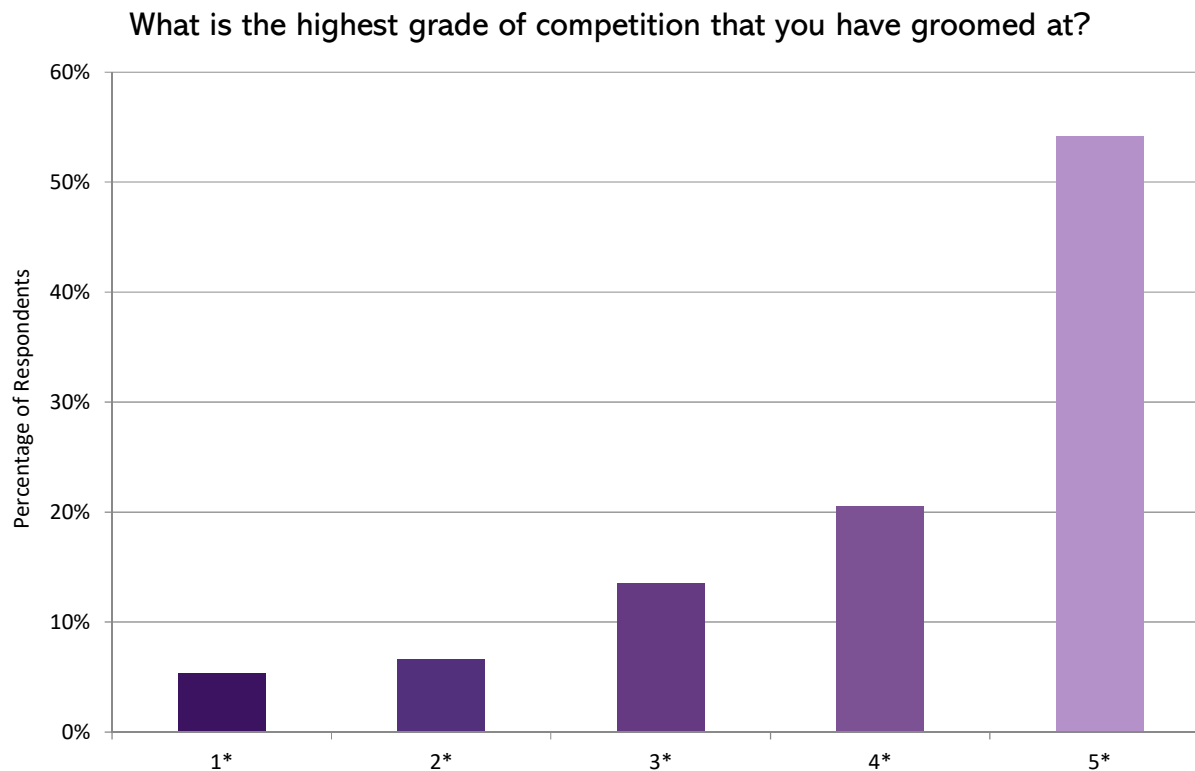


The three disciplines most represented in this survey are:

- Showjumping (51%)
- Eventing (29%)
- Dressage (12%)

There were also contributions from grooms in driving, endurance, para dressage and vaulting.

Level of competition

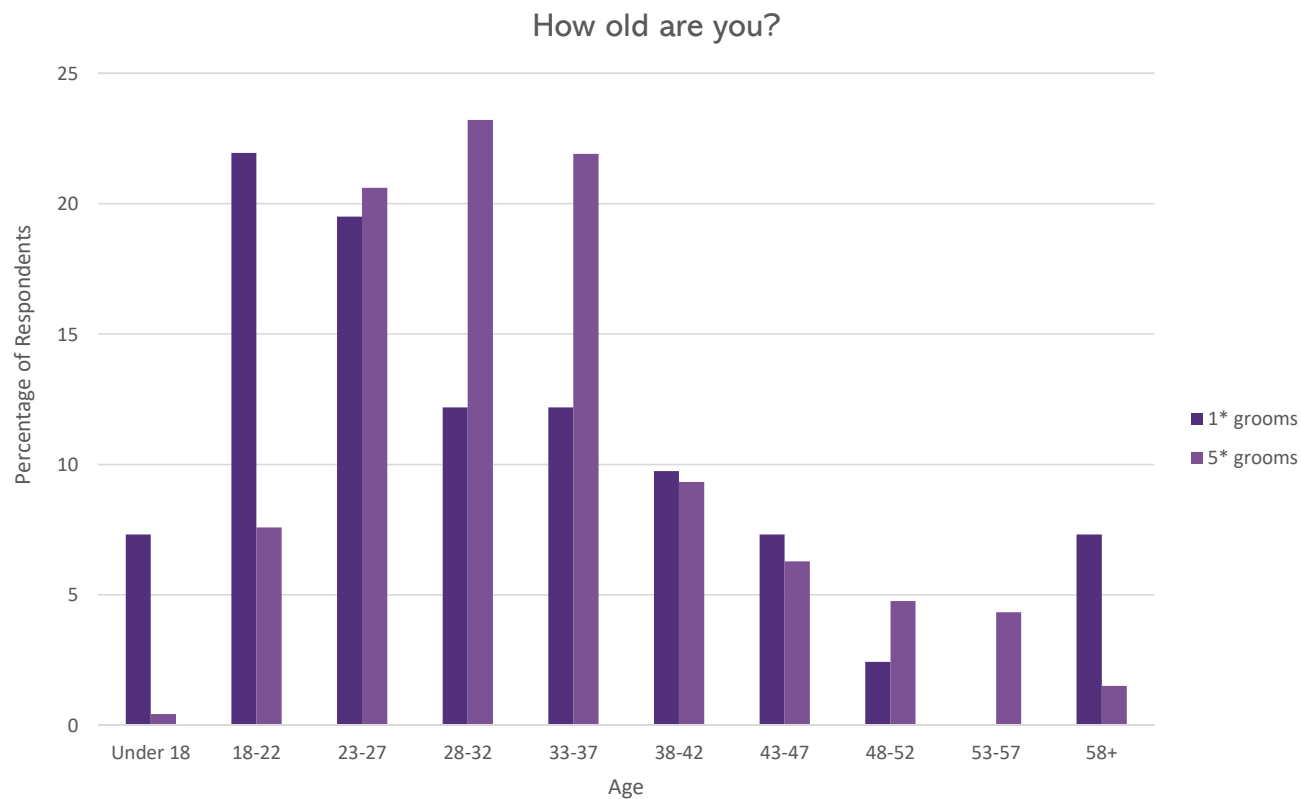


Surveyed grooms were asked which level of competition they have groomed at.

All levels of international competition are represented in this report.

Over half of respondents (54%) reported that they had groomed at 5* level.

Age and level of competition



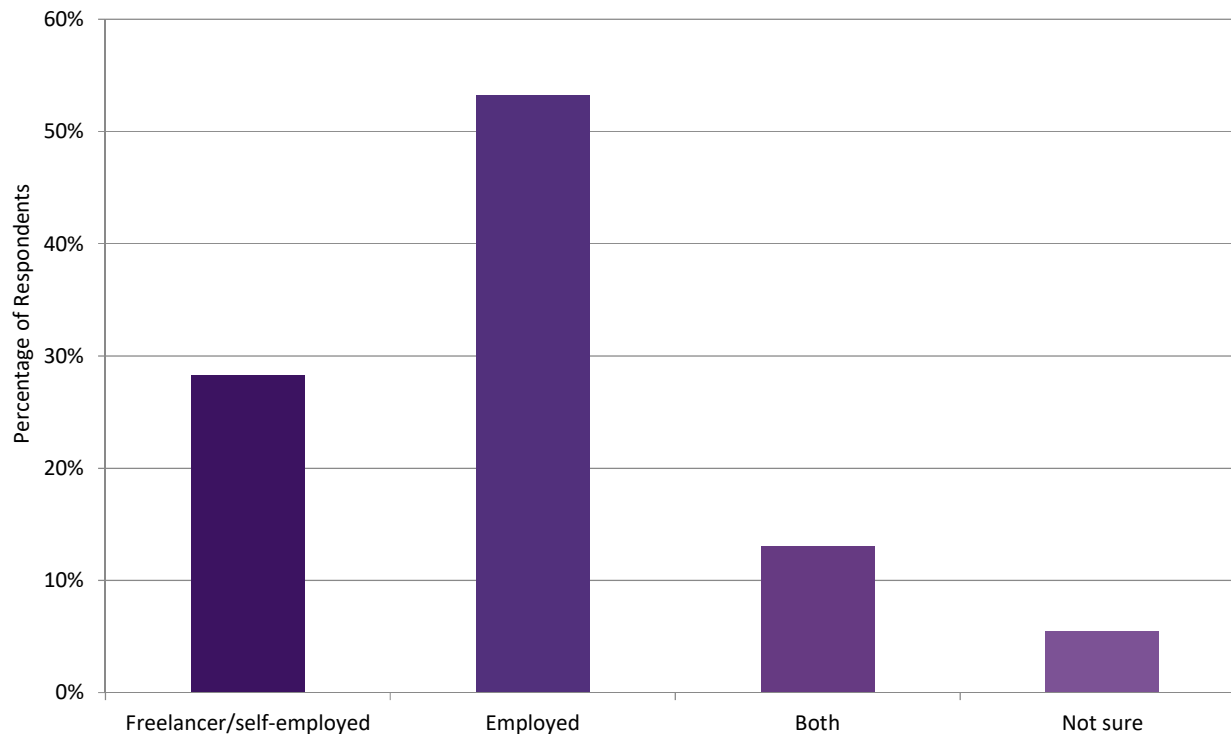
As might be expected, there was a correlation between increasing age and grooming at higher levels of the sport.

However, 7% of respondents who have groomed at 1* level are under 18.

This shows that vulnerable people – children- are grooming at international level, and this should be taken into account when thinking about protections and support that international groomers may need.



Employment status



Respondents were asked to state whether they were a freelancer or self-employed, employed, or both.

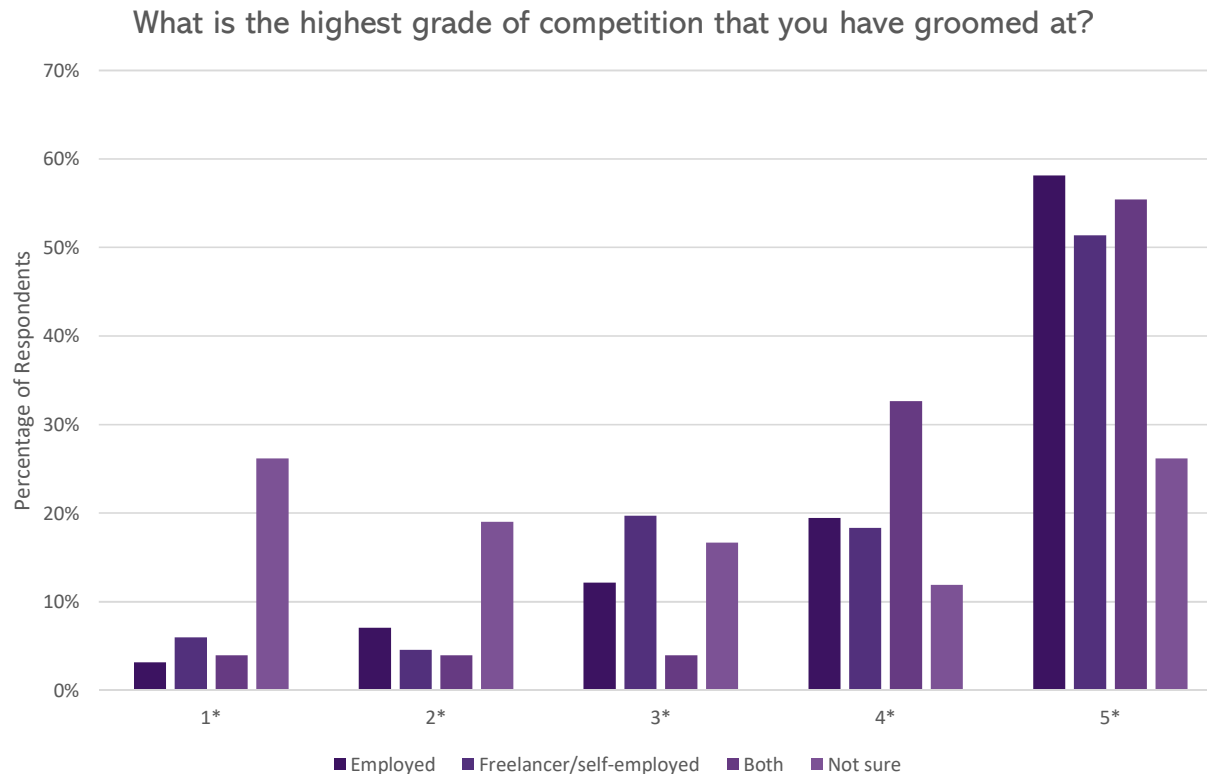
The majority of grooms who responded (53%) are employed.

A small percentage (5%) were unsure of their employment status.

This is concerning given their experience and status at the highest levels of the sport.



Employment status and level of competition



26% of international competition grooms who are unsure of their employment status have groomed or currently groom at 5* level.

This indicates that lack of knowledge about employment status and rights reaches all the way to the very top of the sport.

This, combined with the fact that there are grooms who are unsure of their employment status at every level of the sport, indicates that there is a need for education and information on employment status and rights for all levels of equestrian sport, including the highest level.

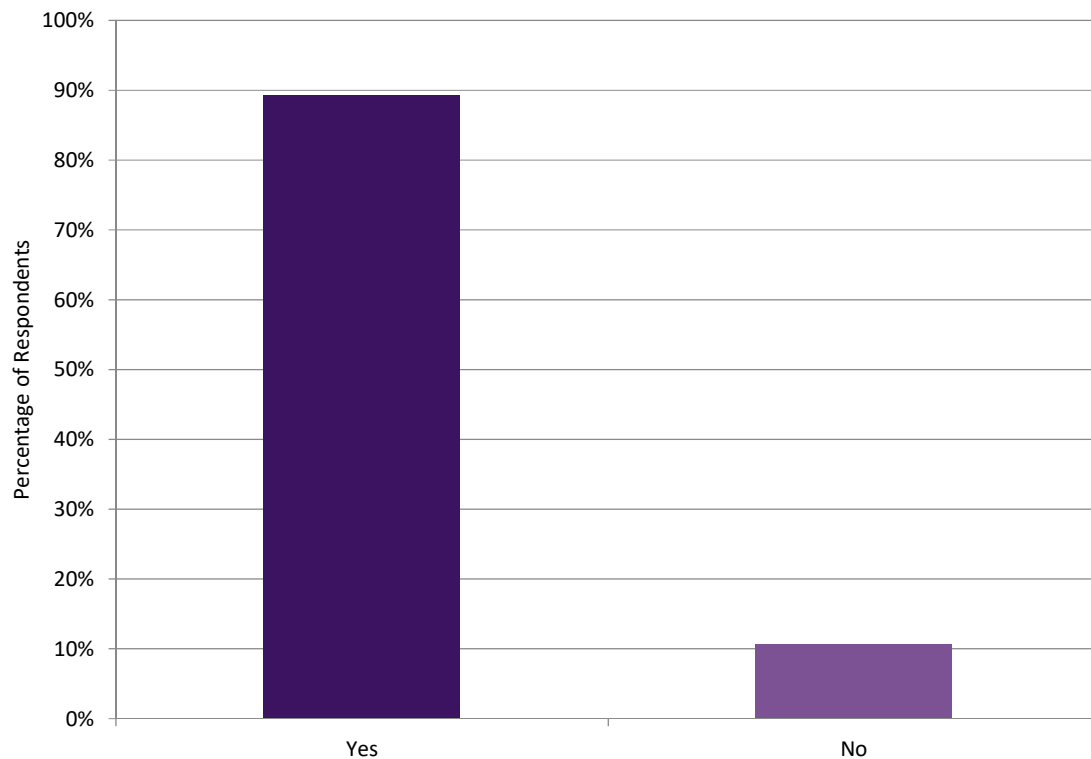


The questions

The remainder of the survey served to investigate how international competition grooms may require further support and their opinions on possible resolutions.

Questions focused on whether there is a need for an FEI recognised Grooms Representative, what that role might be and whether international grooms believe that an independent representative organisation would be beneficial.

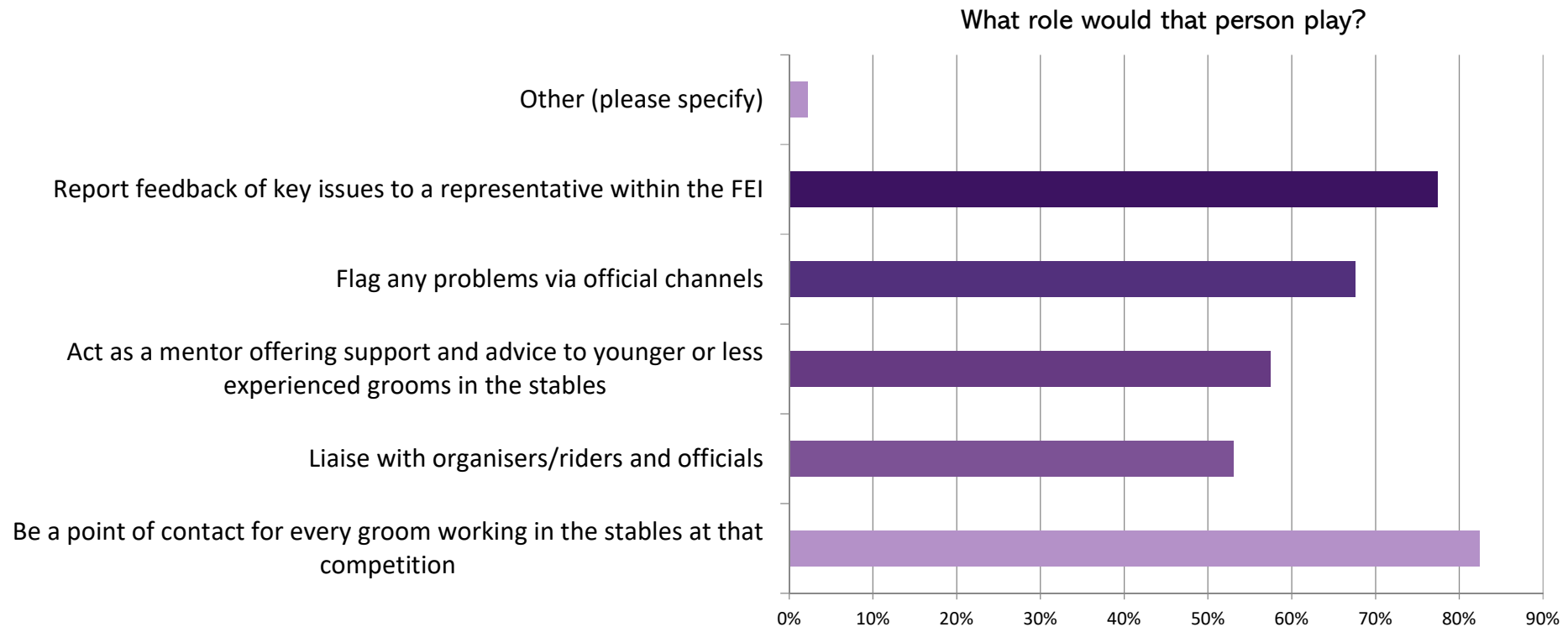
Is there a need for a FEI recognised Grooms Representative at competitions?



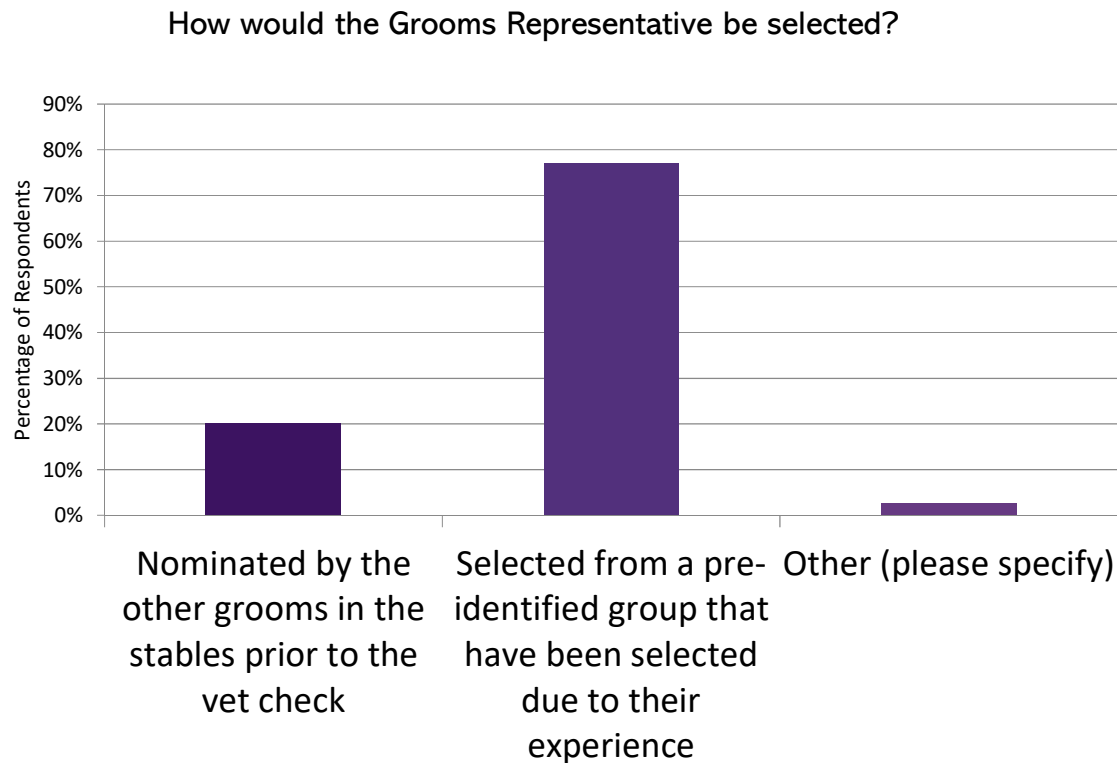
An overwhelming majority (89%) answered 'yes'.

This position is clearly wanted and supported by international competition grooms.

FEI Grooms Representative: The responsibilities.



Selection

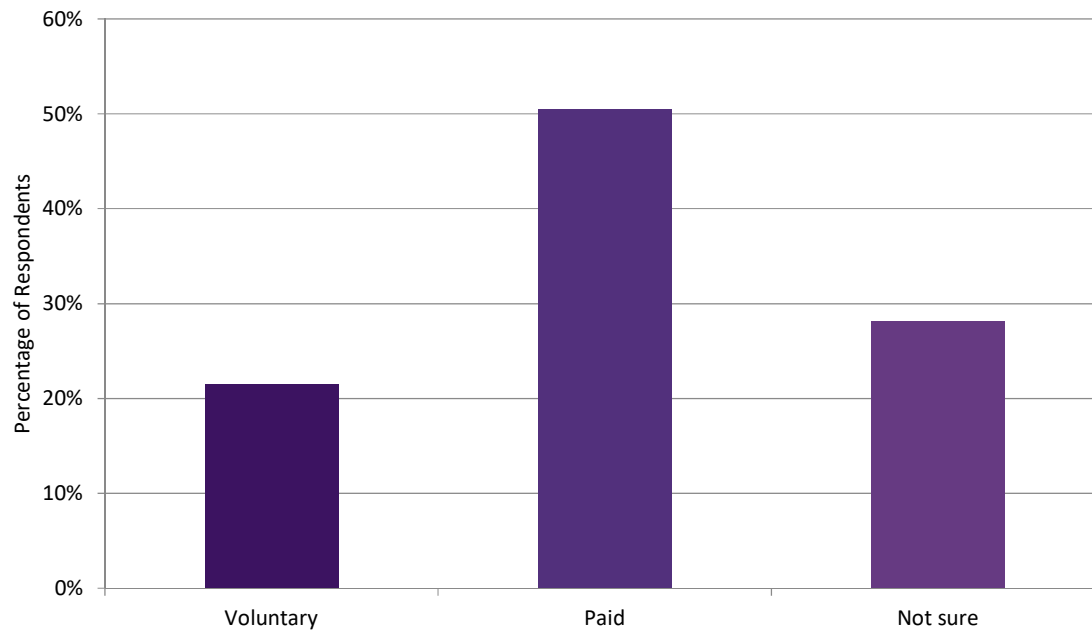


77% would prefer the Grooms Representative to be selected from a pre-identified group that have been selected due to their experience.

Some grooms, when given the opportunity to comment on the selection process, raised a concern about how to keep the selection process fair and unbiased.

For more information, see the 'Further Comments' section.

Voluntary or paid position?

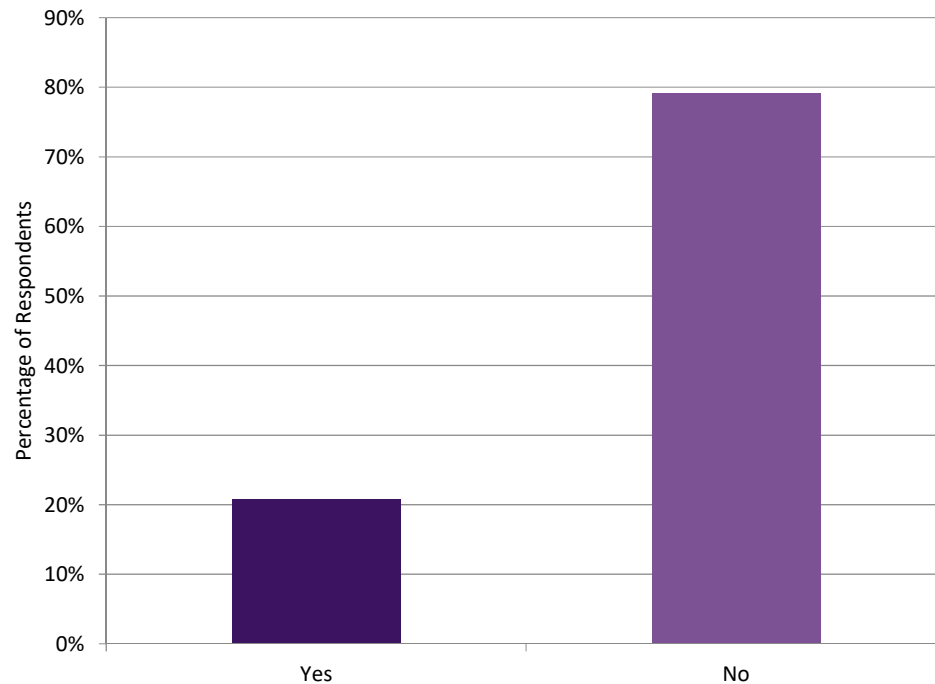


Those surveyed were asked if they felt that the position of Grooms Representative should be a voluntary or paid position.

50% felt that it should be a paid position.

28% were unsure and 21% felt that it should be voluntary.

Are their voices heard?



The international competition grooms were asked if they felt that they currently had a mechanism to have their voice heard.

79% felt that they did not.

This is concerning.

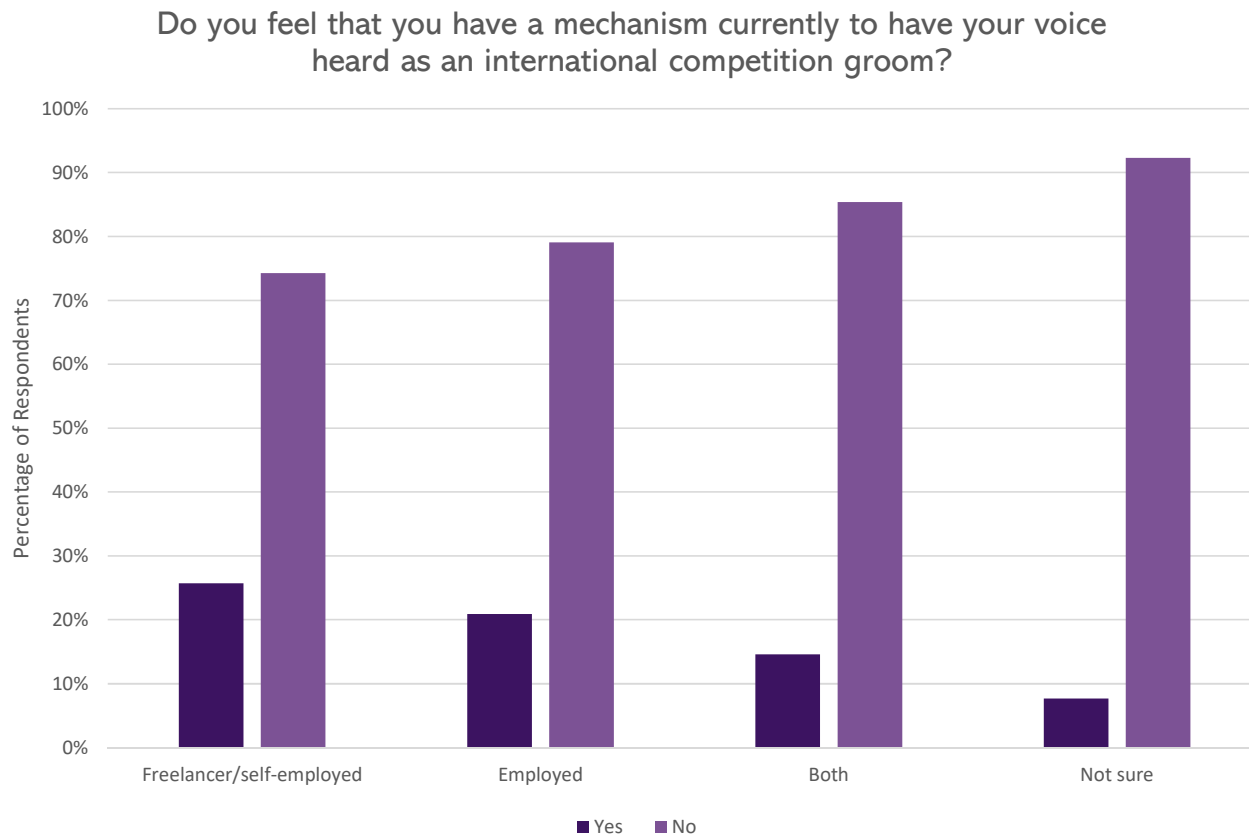
A large majority of international competition grooms feel unheard despite being at the top of their sport.

Clearly there is a need for greater opportunities for these grooms to speak up, and be listened to.



Are their voices heard:

Those who are unsure of their employment status



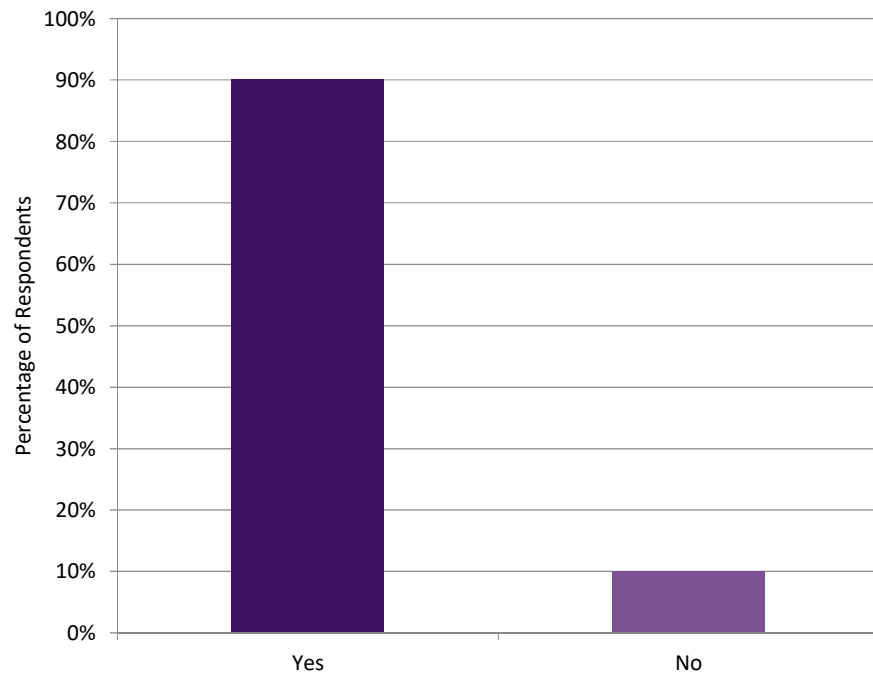
It is clear that in general international competition grooms feel unheard.

Interestingly, 92% of those who are unsure of their employment status feel that their voices are not heard.

These findings show that this is a particularly vulnerable group and they should be particularly focused on when providing support.



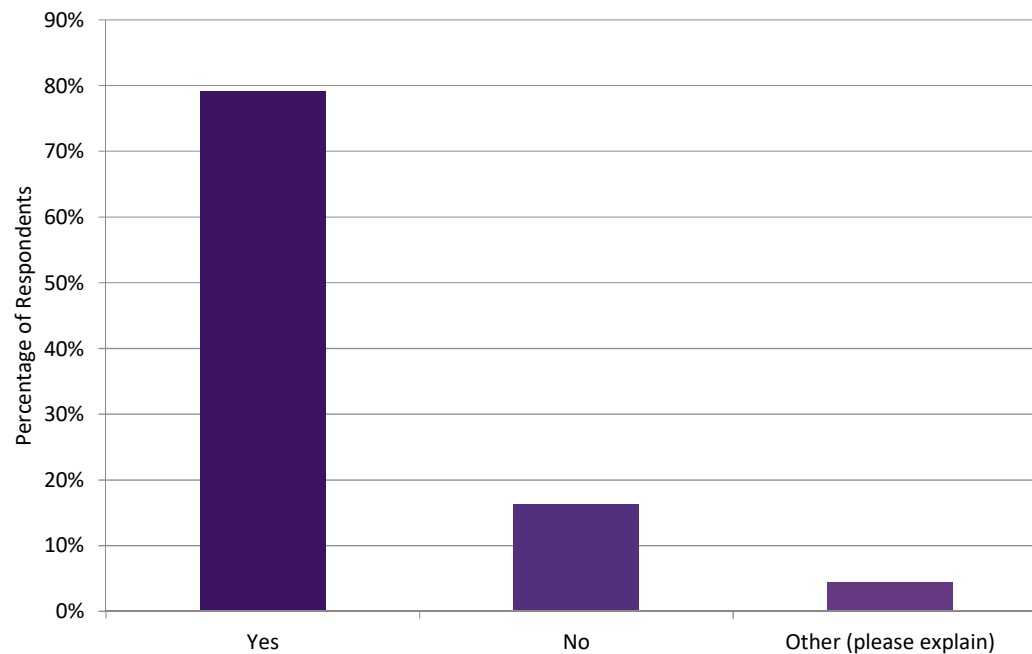
Is there a need for an independent representative organisation?



An overwhelming majority (90%) said that it should exist and be formally recognised by the FEI.

Like the Grooms Representative role, this proposal seems well-received and supported by the majority of international competition grooms surveyed.

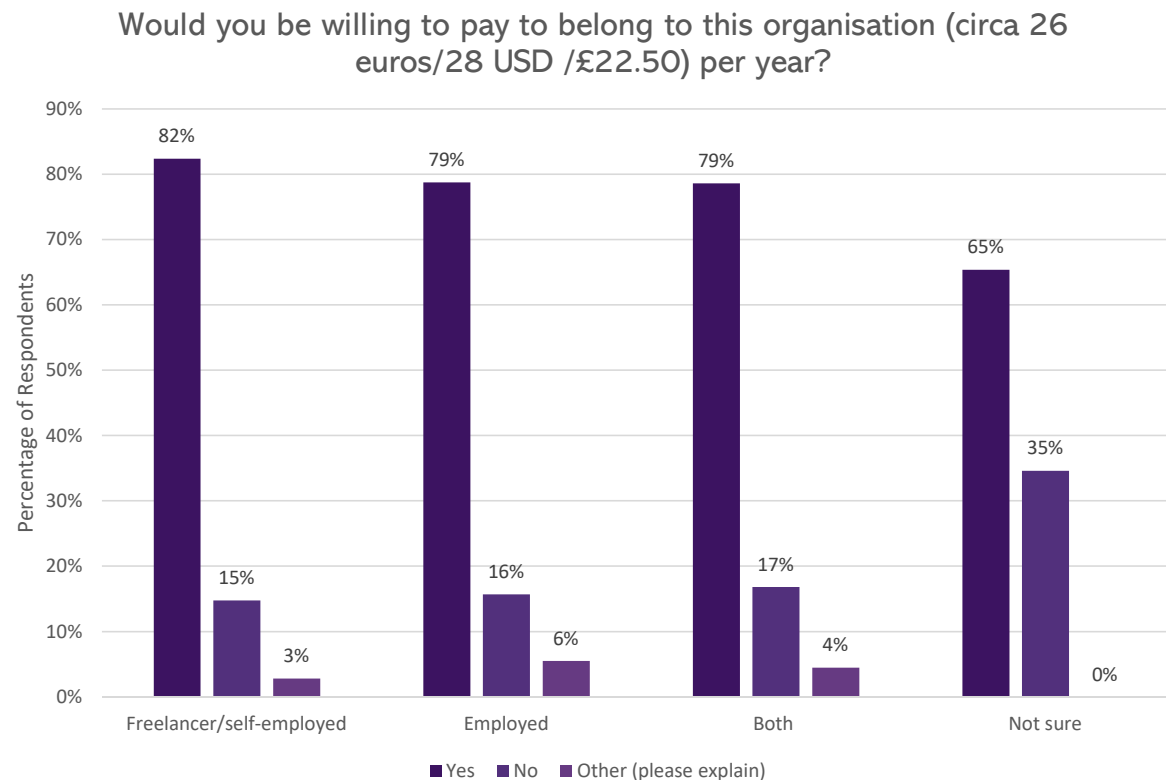
Paying for IGA membership



79% of grooms, when asked, said that they would be willing to pay a sum of 26 euros/28 USD/£22.50 to belong to this organisation.

Some grooms commented that they would consider paying for the organisation if the benefits were clear and the organisation showed where their money was being put to use.

Employment status and willingness to pay for membership



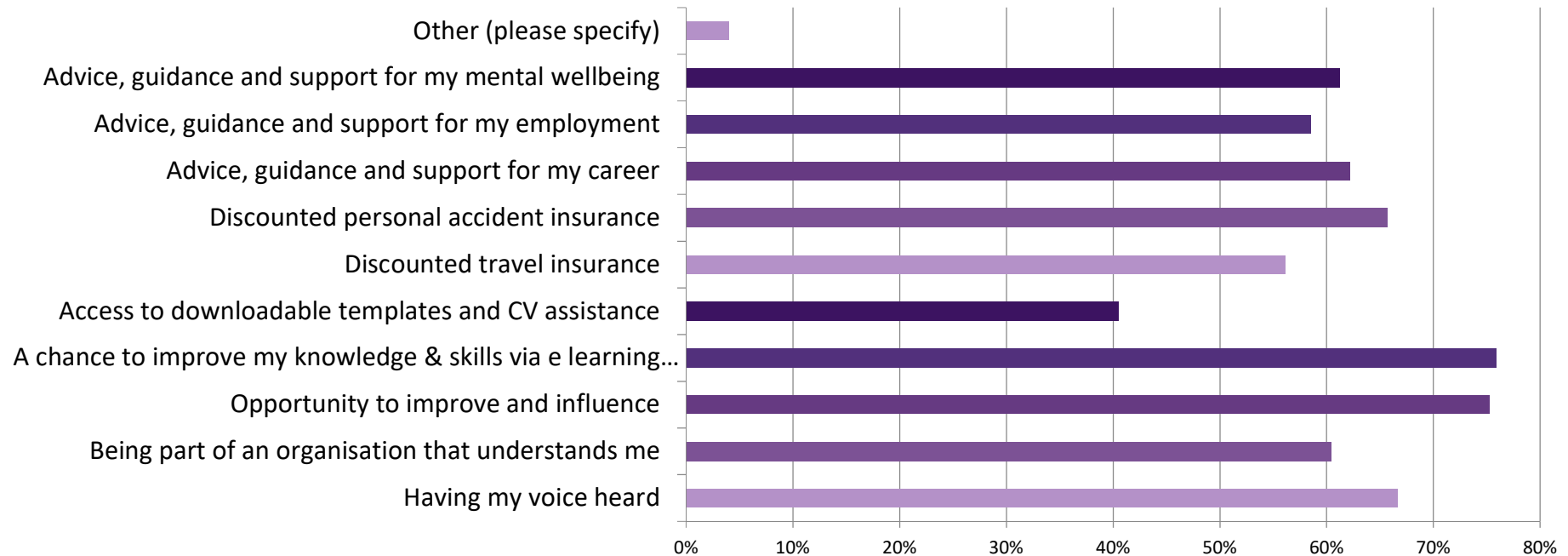
Concerningly, one of the most vulnerable groups that have been highlighted in this report, those who are unsure of their employment status, seem least willing to pay for an independent organisation.

It may be that this group requires targeted advertising to show them how they would benefit from what the organisation has to offer.

However, it should be noted that the majority of this group (65%) would be willing to pay for this organisation.

Potential Member Benefits

Which of the following would be great member benefits to you?





Further Comments

At the end of the survey, the grooms were asked if they had any further comments.

This question elicited a variety of illuminating opinions. Many of these were constructive and already indicated areas that grooms require support on.

The fact that so many useful thoughts were prompted by this question bodes well for the future of a role and an organisation that would better take grooms' voices and opinions into account.

Positive responses

The fact that the BGA, Show Grooms International and FEI are working together to focus on international competition grooms was warmly received.

- I believe that having a groom's voice heard is very important, I feel like the groom is also a voice of the horses they manage and the horses always should come first.
- I think what you are trying to do would be amazing! I have been a FEI groom for over ten years. I'd love to help in any way I can!
- I think is very important have someone that can be the voice of the grooms.
- All of these are brilliant ideas and very needed for grooms at the top of the sport.
- This is a very good idea. Good luck.
- Appreciate this initiative!
- I think this is important initiative. I'd like to contribute to it.
- Super achievement, well done!
- I would like to thank you guys for all your worries.
- Olympia pay me to assist the grooms and be their voice, there have been things that we have been able to improve on, e.g. getting their accommodation closer. The stable managers generally do their best, but a voice to the main office is beneficial.
- I am so happy to see this moving forward. After Burghley I approached Marilyn Payne with the idea of a groom's liaison and she took it to the FEI. I am incredibly happy to see that it has continued to move forward- we had this at the Ocala Jockey Club in Nov 2019 and will have a person acting in place for Carolina International & The Fork Horse Trials in March & April of 2020. I would love to be a point of contact here in the United States and help in any way I can.
- To have this for the international grooms would be invaluable.
- I was a FEI groom. I worked in the industry over 30 years. It's great finally to see you fight for grooms. They work so hard with no say and no rights. I manage a large company in Ireland; if I can assist or be a voice and support you in any way I'm happy to do that in my position now. Thank you for doing this and taking initiative.
- This is a great start and I am thrilled that consideration is being given to this much needed representation!
- Thank you for making sure that grooms get more recognition by the FEI!

Comments on recognition and employment

Employment rights are clearly an important issue for international competition grooms. Wages and working hours came up repeatedly in comments.

This indicates a need for an independent body that could provide international competition grooms with advice regarding their employment and also provide guidance to those that are self employed.

Further to the finding that the majority of international competition grooms surveyed feel unheard, comments showed that they feel that they do not receive their due recognition within the sport.

This indicates that work could be done to improve grooms' standing in the sport and give them the recognition they deserve.

Comments on recognition and employment within the sport

- More promotion to employers to enforce wage laws.
- The welfare of grooms is largely dependent on the attitude of their athlete. Perhaps the athletes need some training in people management!
- A lot of the time grooms are mistreated, overworked and underpaid. There needs to be stricter regulations in place to protect grooms from unfair pay and working conditions especially when travelling away for shows. Meals and breaks need to be supported and riders be more aware of this.
- I think current grooms need to understand that they deserve to be paid a fair price for the sacrifice and the amount of hours they work. There should be a limit to the amount of hours a groom can work similar to those driving a truck, it can be dangerous to the horses and to the groom themselves. Sometimes we are caught working 7 days a week, 10-hour days and only getting paid an 8-hour salary with no overtime. I think a lot of "trainers" make you feel bad when you ask for more compensation. Grooms are very important in this industry but not treated that way everywhere and that needs to be brought to everyone's attention.
- Riders all pay very low wages. It is a joke that they even get away with it. It is mad.
- As difficult as it is to try and regulate salary for grooms, there needs to be a minimum wage, as some young grooms get treated like slaves and hardly earn any money, willing to do anything, no matter how crazy, which sometimes endangers their life. These grooms are not supported enough throughout the community or even believed. Something needs to change there.
- I think there should be some regulations regarding working conditions for grooms and in other roles within the equine industry. Right now employers can decide how much wage they pay which is often way too low considering the hours worked. We always work on weekends, late nights, early mornings, public holidays but don't get any extra pay for it. In any other sector there are regulations regarding double pay on Sunday and public holidays, paying overtime etc... But for some reason none of this counts within the equine industry.
- There needs to be a group in place that enforces fair wages, safe place to speak, place to further knowledge etc. There is one for everyone else, why not us?
- There should be more information made available and more emphasis put to riders and owners regarding the treatment of grooms within a professional business environment. Just because professional riders run a business it doesn't make them businessmen or women, which often means a lack of management skills, and with sports such as eventing often being done on a financial shoestring employing someone with these skills is often unachievable. I believe that it is the responsibility of the governing bodies whether that be your riders national federation or the FEI for those riders who are not on their world class training programs, to educate and set guideline for these professional working relationships to start to form!

Comments on recognition and employment within the sport

- Updates and information are always passed to the rider, yet not always the groom!
- Personally, I feel that a lot of shows are never taking the grooms into account, whether it's working hours, poor working conditions or complete lack of respect. As unfortunately I feel that the majority of show organisers see the grooms as the lesser party.
- It's time we were recognised as professionals. Many of us not only 'groom' but participate in the competition. Being a backstepper is a skill in itself and this is currently overlooked by the FEI.
- We are treated unfairly and there is a struggle to be recognised for your work within the industry as a groom.
- There needs to be more opportunities for grooms to make this into a career and afford their life as well as not be bullied by previous employers if they decide to leave.
- I feel as if there is a global lack of respect towards grooms. They're underpaid, and overworked. They need to be legally recognized as a working position, and paid just as much as someone flipping hamburgers at McDonald's. Grooms are a vital part to keeping a good program running and it's time they be treated as such.
- I feel that in the sport now in this day and age it has changed drastically with rules and regulations, but the staff and grooms seem to be still stuck in the dark ages, it is time we move forward and have our voices heard.
- Too often grooms are asked to travel with no means of their own transportation and healthy food options are limited. I think some kind of awareness/program to help grooms stay in peak mental and physical health while traveling could enhance the sport because grooms that take care of themselves can better care for the horses.
- I don't think we're given enough support by most employers or the FEI.
- I think grooms could be recognized more, a lot of riders are great but some get away with treating their grooms very poorly. A point of contact would be helpful, so you know that you could get advice/help.

Comments on the Grooms Representative role

Overall the comments seemed positive towards the idea of a Grooms Representative, seeing it as an opportunity to have a voice and solve problems that may arise at shows promptly.

The comments tended to centre around the selection process and the responsibilities that person may have.

Concerns were raised about how to select a Grooms Representative in a way that is unbiased.

In relation to responsibilities, respondents were worried that having the role of Grooms Representative may conflict with their other duties as a groom.

Comments on the Grooms Representative role: Selection

- Be selective, if you are going to have people represent grooms make sure it's someone who can relate to grooms, a well-travelled, international person, I myself would take that role if I got paid as I am Mexican American and lived all around Europe, worked at the best stables worldwide and people are very familiar with me, I have a voice, I lead grooms to improve as well as educating them. I would love this position If it ever became FEI-official.
- I think this person should not be a groom but should have a deep insight in how grooms work.
- Bullying within the grooms' circle is a common problem. FEI stewards could easily take on this role and be stricter on how people behave. Riders could educate their staff better. Many young grooms are lacking experience of working under good leadership and are expected to do a job.
- They have no education or experience and this is a part of where problems start. Would FEI not be able to educate young grooms or stewards spending more time in stable areas etc.?
- I think the idea is really beneficial. But because grooms usually move in cliques, appointing a representative should be done with caution in case of favouritism. Also, if a groom is a representative, how will it be doable next to our never-ending job on shows?
- It is a great idea but the problem is that the grooms that are most popular that will be selected to be a representative and will also put themselves forward are not necessarily the best candidates to do this. At the minute there is a tendency for many "top" grooms to care about social media and their exposure than to care for the horses.

Comments on the Grooms Representative role: Responsibilities

- I think it would be important to have a FEI groom working with the stewards and ground jury.
- Different grooms not always the same grooms, different at each show. Selected by the FEI from grooms that have put their name forward. To improve the wellbeing and safety of horses, riders and grooms. And to stop cheating. As for a paid position I'm not sure. Can't speak for all grooms but if it was myself I want to improve the sport and welfare of the horses. As a Rep I don't think a position should be made to give grooms advice about careers or grooming techniques. There is a fine line there.
- This representative should be able to highlight problems at shows through official channels e.g. safety issues, unfair working conditions (e.g. too many night classes).
- I feel that having a representative at shows would be great. Someone that can voice problems or concerns at horse shows could really help us out. I've been to horse shows where there are issues in the barn yet it takes them 2-3 days to fix them. By the time they fix the issue the show is over. I think having a representative would stop these kinds of things.
- In my opinion, it should not be a working groom that represents all the grooms at the show but just like FEI stewards who "help" horses and riders to stay in the rules, should be a FEI stewards who helps the groom stay in the good track, with their job, a person they can talk to if they have a problem at the show, with their horse or rider or employer.
- Would be nice to have someone you can discuss your fears with regarding how riders/owners treat their horse in a confidential way. Sometimes unethical practices are used and grooms see and are expected to do things they would not do to their own horses and if they speak out they are victimised or forced to leave their jobs.
- If the rep has many responsibilities, would it not be too much to do as well as say having 5 horses at an event?
- It would be a great idea to have someone at the shows who we can talk to. It's too often grooms are disrespected and we work long days. Especially when classes run into night, we still have to start at the crack of dawn, ready to start again. Then on the flip side, we need someone that can look over the bad grooms too, to be able to speak to someone you see abuse on the show ground toward the horses or bullying to other grooms.
- Communication can be lacking which leads to difficulty in feedback from grooms. An opportunity to provide feedback about what works and doesn't to someone in a governing body, who can in turn share this info with organizers could be helpful. It would also be helpful to have a liaison in the event that problems arise (a recent example being locked out of the barns on Sunday morning at a 5*, despite the barns being "open" due to a lack of stewards, so we were unable to get in to prepare for jogs) where we may not otherwise have any options. Also, helpful would be support prior to/during international trips, especially when traveling for an individual and not the team.

Suggestions for improvement:

Food

Many grooms offered suggestions for how conditions could be improved for them while at competitions.

One topic that was frequently raised was food. They noted that often, with classes beginning early and ending late, that it can be difficult to find places to get food as many places are not open at those times.

They also raised the issue of food tokens, suggesting that these should be provided at shows for grooms. One groom noted that, this being the case, enough should be provided so that everyone on larger grooming teams would receive them rather than just getting a fixed amount per rider or competitor.

Overall this was one of the most mentioned topics, showing this is clearly important to international competition grooms.

Suggestions for improvement:

Food

- There is a huge difference in terms of responsibilities across disciplines. A team of five horses for driving requires a much bigger team of grooms than for some other disciplines, yet the vouchers for meals etc simply do not reflect this reality.
- Look after grooms just as much as owners and riders, even small gestures make such a difference for example providing food/drink tokens or allowing enough time between horses/classes.
- Food at events often opens too late and closes too early for grooms to get food during long days.
- I think every rider should make donation of maybe 10 per show so that grooms could have access to breakfast. It doesn't need to be a 5* breakfast but maybe some cereal, bread cheese etc. Additionally I also think something needs to be done regarding grooms' accommodation. No groom should have to sleep in the back of a truck on a blow-up bed while the rider sleeps above the cab.
- I love being a groom and have been grooming at FEI events for over 10 years. My boss is fantastic but I feel that for the long hours of physical work we do there should be allowances made for food and beverages. It is so expensive to eat whilst away at shows and if you don't have hook-up in your lorry cooking is difficult. (And after a long day not what you want to do!) having also worked in racing where food/drinks are provided or at least reasonably priced, I feel some sort of meal vouchers would go a very long way in keeping grooms happy and better able to do our job.
- Many shows recognise owners and riders but the grooms can be ignored. The food can be expensive, toilet & shower facilities can be poor or non-existent. I have been a groom now for over 30 years and I still can feel like a 2nd class citizen at certain shows.
- Instead of paying a representative, the payment could be benefits at the show (free food, access to VIP etc.)

Suggestions for Improvements:

Schedules

Several noted that schedules at shows can be long and busy which affects grooms particularly as they begin work earlier and finish work later than the schedule.

Similarly, with their riders competing in numerous classes on a given day, some struggle to find breaks between classes.

Some suggested consulting with grooms when producing schedules to allow for enough time for grooms to complete their duties.

- Schedules at competitions should be looked at since grooms have the hardest hours.
- I think that show organisers and the FEI need to have a better control on timings. Some shows don't finish till very late at night and behind the scenes grooms still have a lot to do once the last horse walks out the ring.
- I think there should be a few people at night with horse knowledge around the stables in case of emergency i.e. colic etc.

Comments focusing on international issues

The influx of comments from all over the world show that this truly is an international issue. Although the British Grooms Association serves British grooms who travel internationally, the comments from people of other nationalities indicate that there is a need for representation for grooms across the world.

- What should be included to all countries of the world where possible, to work as grooms in countries of equestrian excellence, for example: that we have a representative where it is linked to each government and thus help in the process of working visas. There are many young people in different countries of the world who would like to work in Europe for example or USA and are disabled by the issue of work visa, having an organization that provides advice would be helpful and intensive for many young people in the world!
- Not just Europe should be recognized but all groups. UAE basically slave labor grooms.
- I wish there was a grooms' organization in the USA and more recognition for grooms in general!

Comments on sexual harassment and bullying

The issue of sexual harassment and anti-bullying was raised. This may be a topic that future research could explore.

- This seems like a great step in the right direction, thank you. Having an eye out for predatory behaviour toward grooms is a hot button topic to me and I'm pleased to see this is being raised to discussion and some platforms are being implemented to attempt to begin to look at and address this.

Especially when considering the % of men in sport vs the % men competing at the top in sport compared with the age of women many grooms start out as- while not necessarily beginning as FEI grooms, to begin a top-down approach of support for grooms makes complete sense. Especially when considering such a dramatic power and often age/maturity differential between new grooms and their elite trainers/riders they work for. To create a stronger community between grooms makes sense. Again, thank you for your time and dedication to this topic.

- Bullying within the grooms' circle is a common problem.



Conclusion

Overall, the findings of this survey indicate that there is much to be done for international competition grooms.

They require greater recognition, better education and support for their employment rights, and opportunities to have a say on issues in the sport that directly affect them.

This could be developed through the creation of an independent organisation that would support grooms and the invention of an FEI recognised Grooms Representative to allow them to have their voices heard.

There is clear support for both of these solutions.