

## WORKFORCE RETENTION SURVEY – SEPTEMBER 2018

The British Grooms Association’s (BGA) survey into workforce retention indicates that there is a worryingly high number of grooms leaving or considering leaving the equestrian profession.

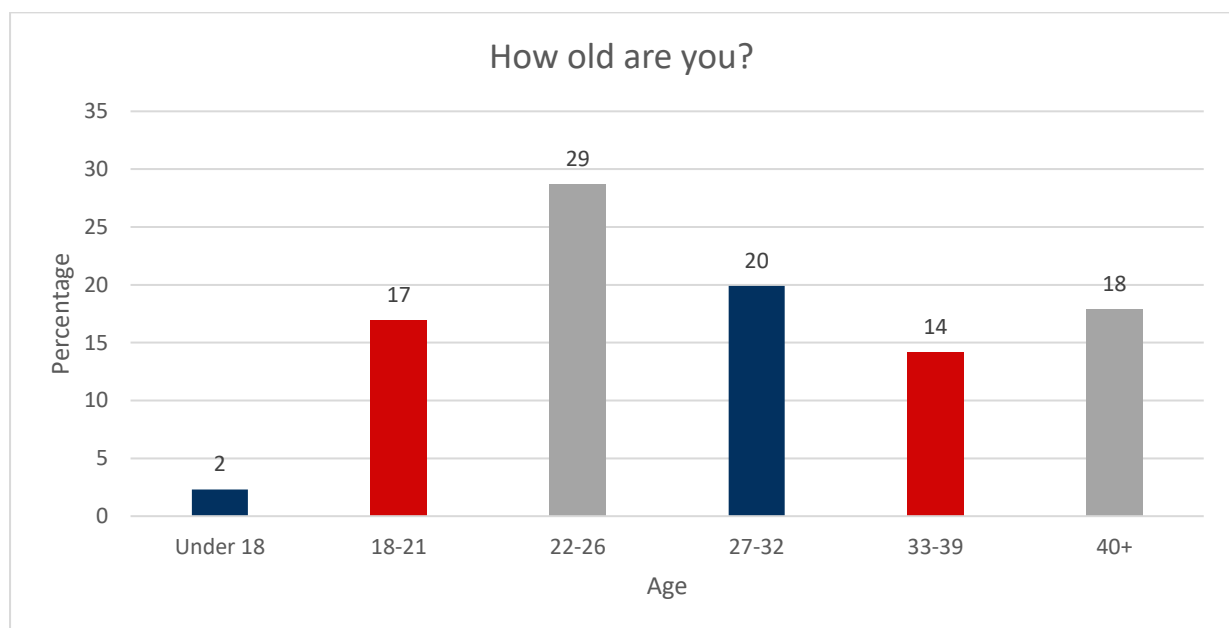
The results show that there is a clear correlation between substandard employment practices and the departure of grooms from the profession. This indicates the necessity for immediate action and a change of culture, and indeed for the existence of the BGA and the Equestrian Employers Association (EEA).

The survey was open for two weeks and nearly 800 grooms took part. Certain questions were designated specifically for:

1. Grooms who have stopped working with horses,
2. Grooms who are considering leaving working with horses,
3. Grooms who are not planning to leave the profession.

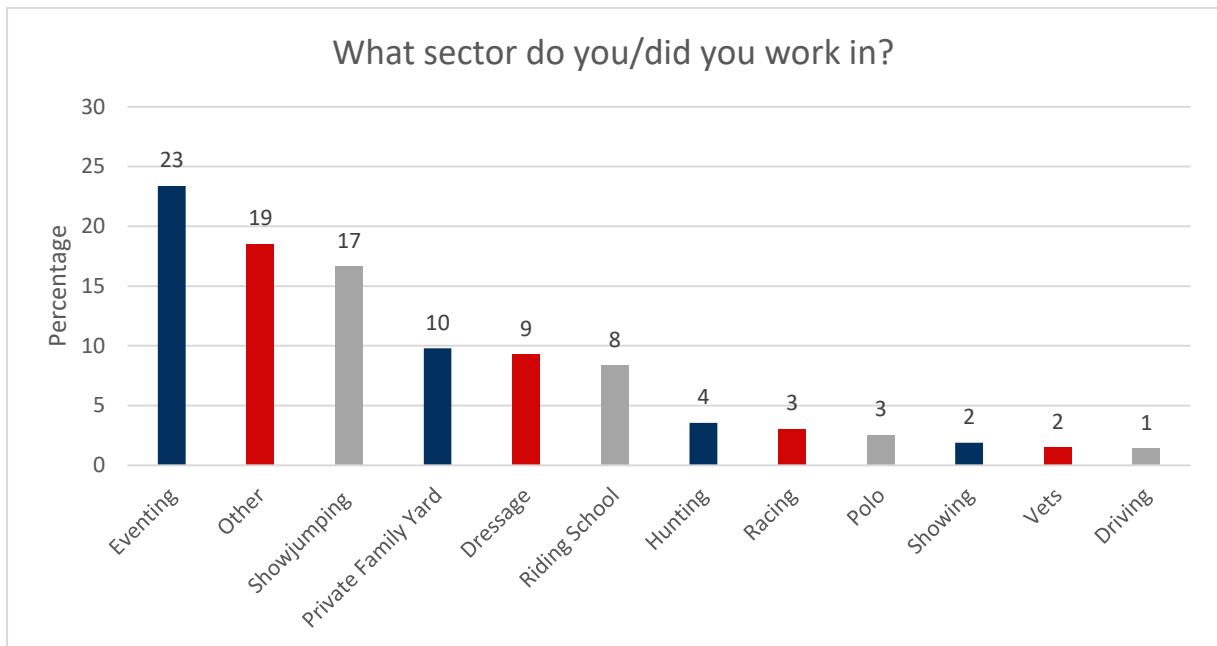
The study provided opportunities for participants to add comments throughout.

### DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS



The grooms who took part ranged from under 18 years old to over 40.

The responses were distributed relatively evenly between the age groups, with the greatest number of responses from those aged 22 to 26, and the fewest from those under 18 years of age.



The respondents worked or currently work in a variety of different sectors including eventing, showjumping, private family yards, and hunting.

## THE RESULTS

This survey shows that there is a worrying number of grooms leaving the equestrian profession.

Over half (56%) of the grooms who were happy in their careers knew of colleagues who have left working with horses recently. **The problem is rife.**

### EXPERIENCE IS LEAVING

Not only is it alarming that so many are leaving the profession, but it is further worrying that it is **experienced** grooms who are leaving.

- Over 60% of grooms who had left or were considering leaving working with horses (61% and 63% respectively) had been working with horses for 5 years or longer.
- Over a quarter of those who had left or were considering leaving working with horses have worked with horses for 11 years or more.

### GROOMS ARE LEAVING AGAINST THEIR WILL

Not only are these experienced grooms leaving or considering leaving, it has been found that they are being forced to do so against their will.

Over 80% of grooms who have left or are considering leaving the profession said that they were sad or devastated to leave, or to be considering leaving working with horses. This suggests that this exodus of grooms is not occurring by choice; something is forcing grooms to reconsider their employment in the equestrian industry.

The results show that it is a variety of substandard employment conditions such as long working hours, the inability to take annual leave entitlement, poor working relationships with employers, and issues with pay – both legal and illegal – that is causing these experienced grooms to leave the equestrian profession against their will.

Indeed, this is further evidenced by the fact that over half (58%) of the grooms who are considering leaving working with horses would reconsider if their employment conditions were much improved.

**Some comments from these grooms include:**

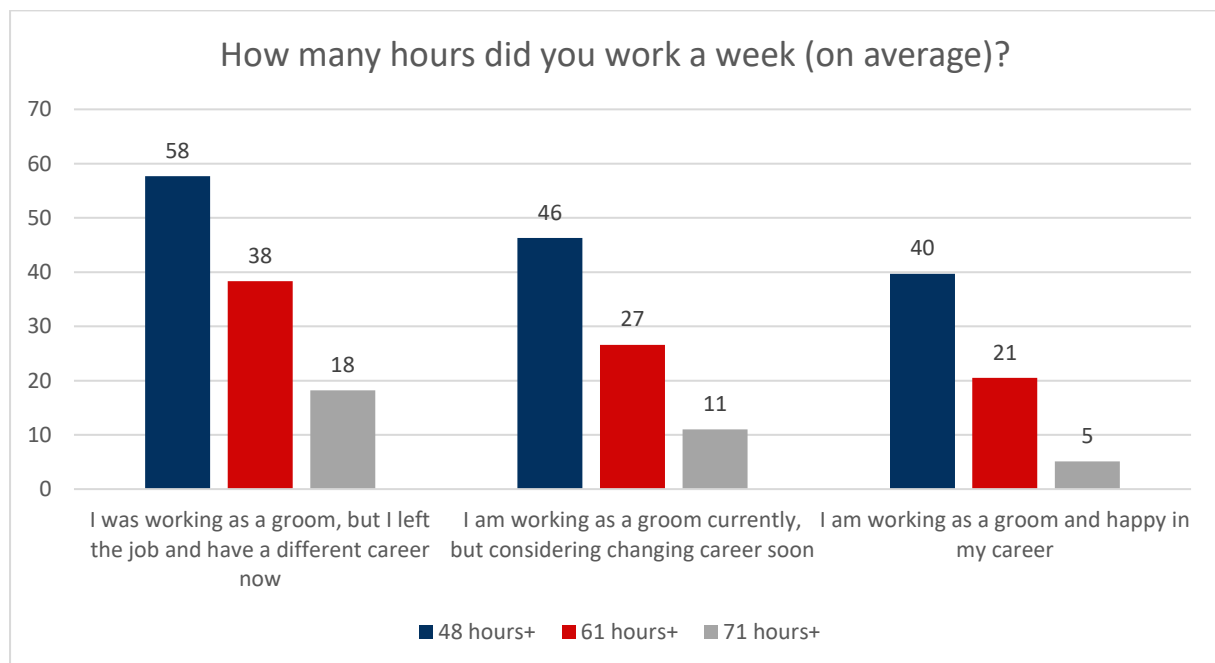
*“I would love to be able to carry on as a groom but after 27 years working and being really good at my job I am still on minimum wage and in some positions, I didn’t even get that. I will never own a house; I haven’t been on holiday since I was 20 because I cannot afford it – I am now 45. I would reconsider if the job paid a proper wage, and people were treated better and not expected to work 6 or 7-day weeks without proper holidays.”*

*“I would reconsider working with horses if there were more progression options.”*

*“I would consider returning if conditions were better (pay/leave/more staff to horses’ ratio).”*

**FACTORS IMPACTING GROOMS’ DECISION TO LEAVE WORKING WITH HORSES**

**WORKING HOURS**



The results of this question indicate that grooms, no matter how happy they are, work incredibly long hours. However, there is a correlation between whether a given groom is happy in their career or not, and how many hours they work a week.

- The grooms who have left the profession worked the greatest number of hours per week on average. Over half (58 %) worked over the 48-hour work week set out by the UK government. 18% said that they worked 71 hours or more per week.
- Of those who are considering leaving working with horses, almost half (46%) reported working over the 48-hour work week and 11% reported working over 71 hours a week.
- Those who were happiest in their careers worked comparatively fewer hours than those who have left or are considering leaving working with horses. 40% reported that they worked over the 48-hour work week, with only 5% reporting that they worked over 71 hours a week.

The fact that grooms are working such long hours per week – over the 48-hour work week guideline set out by the government to protect employees – is concerning as it may negatively affect grooms’ health. This is further concerning when it is considered that grooming is frequently tiring, physical work.

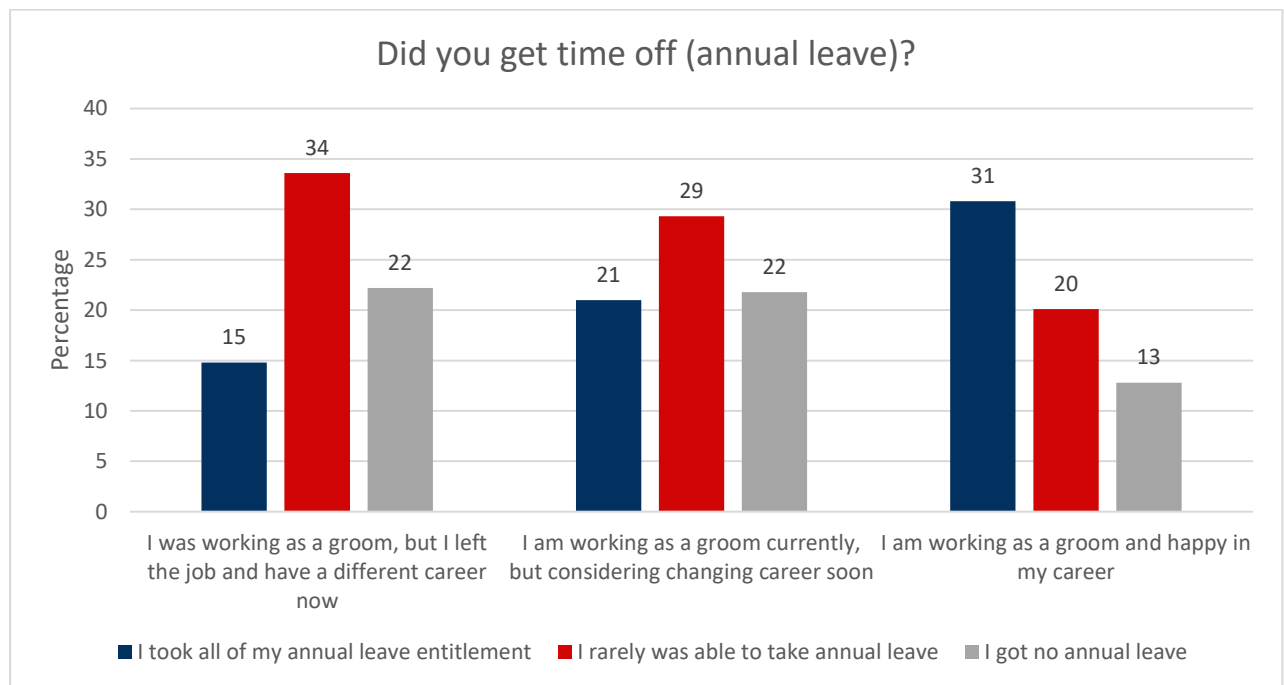
Grooms who took this survey expressed their concerns about long working hours:

*“I loved working with horses and being involved with eventing, however the working hours and pay weren’t sustainable in my experience.”*

*“I have worked in the industry since I was 13 years old. I am now 35 and am considering leaving working with horses because I am tired of the 6-day week and long hours.”*

These findings suggest that such long hours are placing a strain on grooms and that it is one of the factors forcing them to leave or consider leaving the profession.

## ANNUAL LEAVE ENTITLEMENT



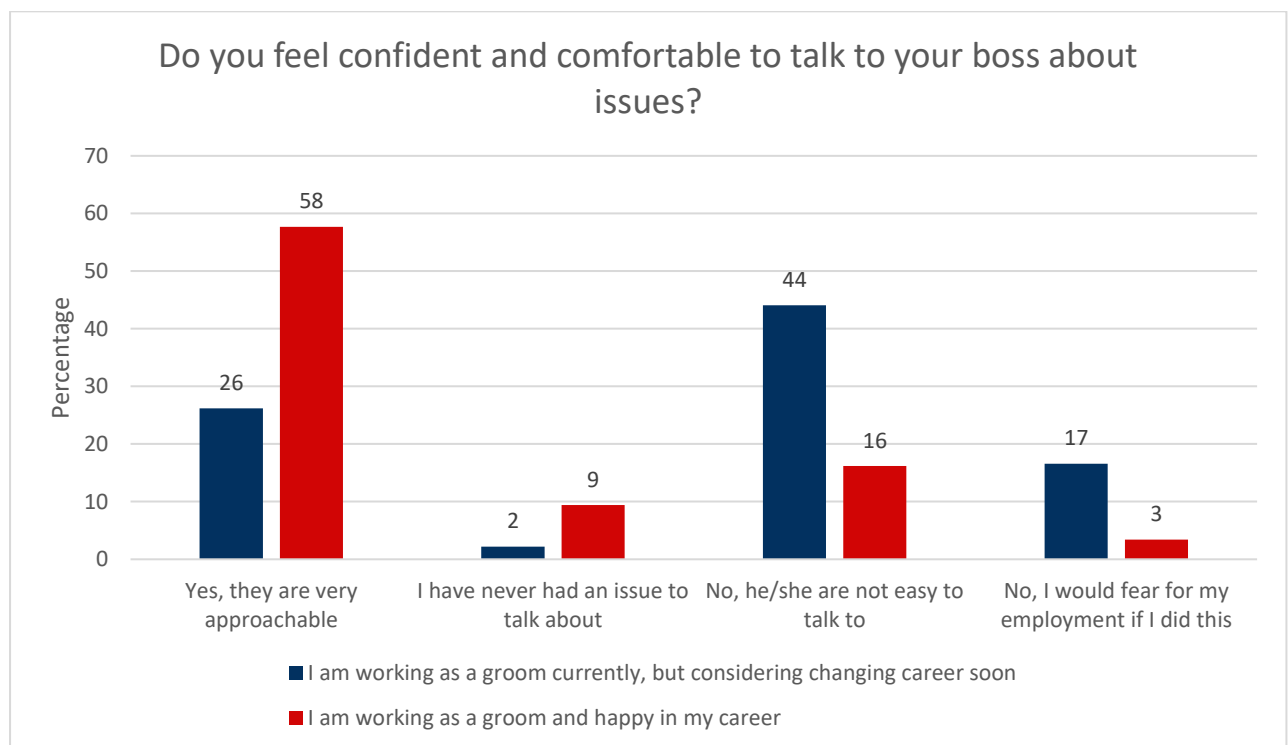
There is a correlation between the amount of annual leave taken by grooms and their happiness in their career. Grooms least happy in their career were least able to take their annual leave entitlement, and grooms most happy in their career were most able to take their annual leave entitlement:

- Over half of the grooms surveyed who were considering leaving (51%) and of those who have now left the profession (56%) were rarely able or unable to take their annual leave entitlement.
- Conversely, only a third (33%) of grooms happy in their career were rarely or never able to take annual leave.
- 31% of those happy in their career were able to take all of their annual leave entitlement.

However, this also shows that annual leave is not being made accessible enough for all grooms, whether they are happy in their career or not.

Annual paid leave is a basic employment right, and it is illegal to not be allowed to take it. This must be rectified.

## WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH EMPLOYER



The working relationship between groom and employer was also found to have a significant impact on whether grooms are considering leaving the profession.

- 61% of grooms who are considering leaving working with horses do not feel able to talk to their employer about issues. 17% would fear for their employment if they spoke to their employer about an issue.

- In contrast, 58% of grooms who are happy in their career **do** feel able to talk to their boss about an issue. Only 3% of grooms who are happy in their careers would fear for their employment if they had to approach their boss with an issue.

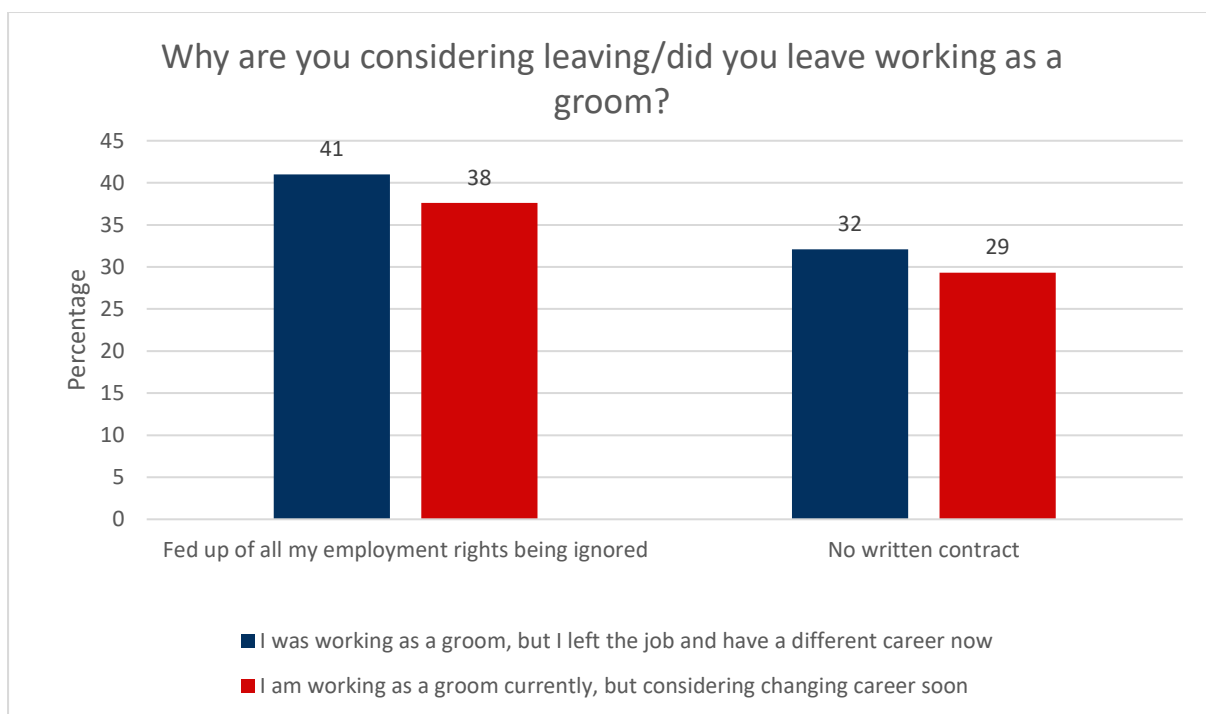
This suggests that those happiest in their careers are those who feel that they can approach their employers and have an open conversation without fear of repercussions.

Indeed, having an open channel in which to not only have conversations about issues but also rewards and compliments is important to grooms:

- Almost three-quarters (74%) of grooms who are happy in their career say that being recognised and appreciated for the work they do is of utmost importance to them.
- Similarly, over half (53%) say that being appreciated by their boss is particularly important.

It is alarming that any groom, happy or not, should fear for their employment when approaching their employer with an issue. This is an equestrian profession workplace culture that must urgently change.

## EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS BEING IGNORED

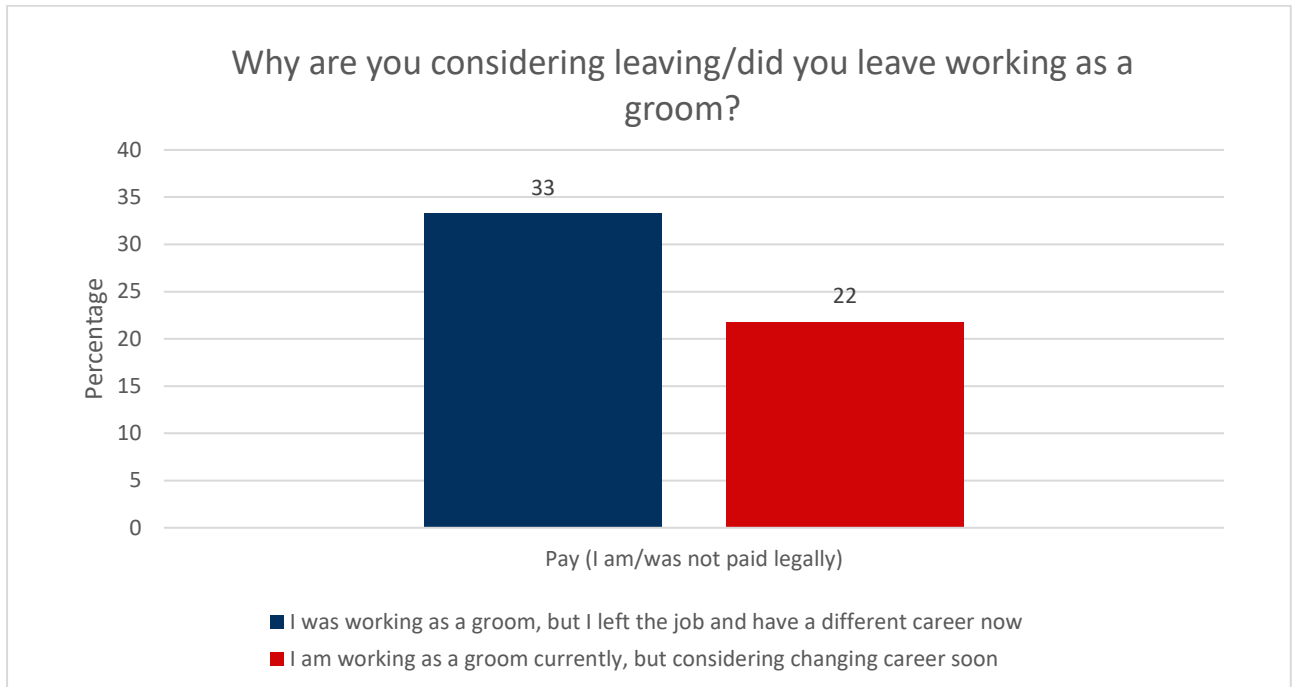


- 41% of the grooms surveyed said that they left the profession due to frustration over their employment rights being ignored. 38% of those considering leaving also expressed this frustration.
- 32% of grooms who have left working with horses reported that they have no written contract. 29% of those considering leaving also reported that they have no written contract.

This again shows that poor employment practices, such as ignoring employment rights or not providing written contracts, are forcing grooms out of the profession.

All employees, in any profession, should feel that their employment rights are respected. Grooms should not have to choose between working in a profession that they enjoy or having their employment rights attended to and ensured.

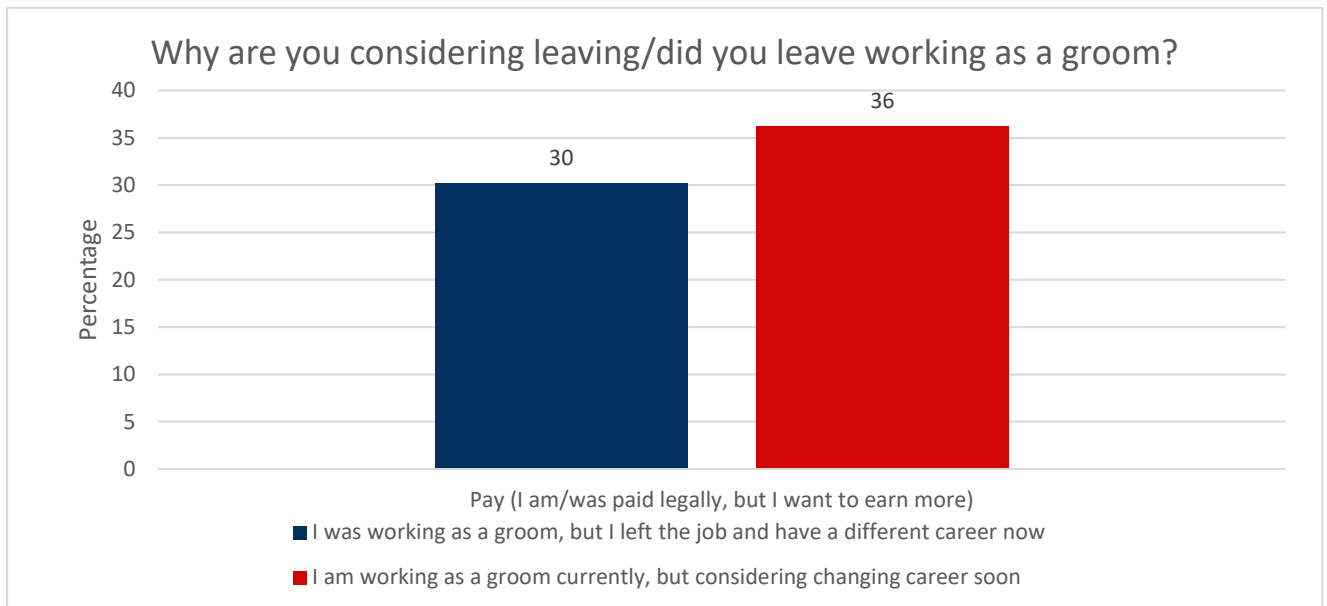
## LEGALLY COMPLIANT SALARIES



Grooms are being forced out of working with horses as they are being paid less than the National Minimum Wage, which is an illegal employment practice.

- A third (33%) of grooms left working with horses because they were not being paid at least the National Minimum Wage.
- Similarly, 22% of those considering leaving working with horses are not being paid legally.

**It is abhorrent that grooms are being forced out of the profession by illegal pay conditions.**

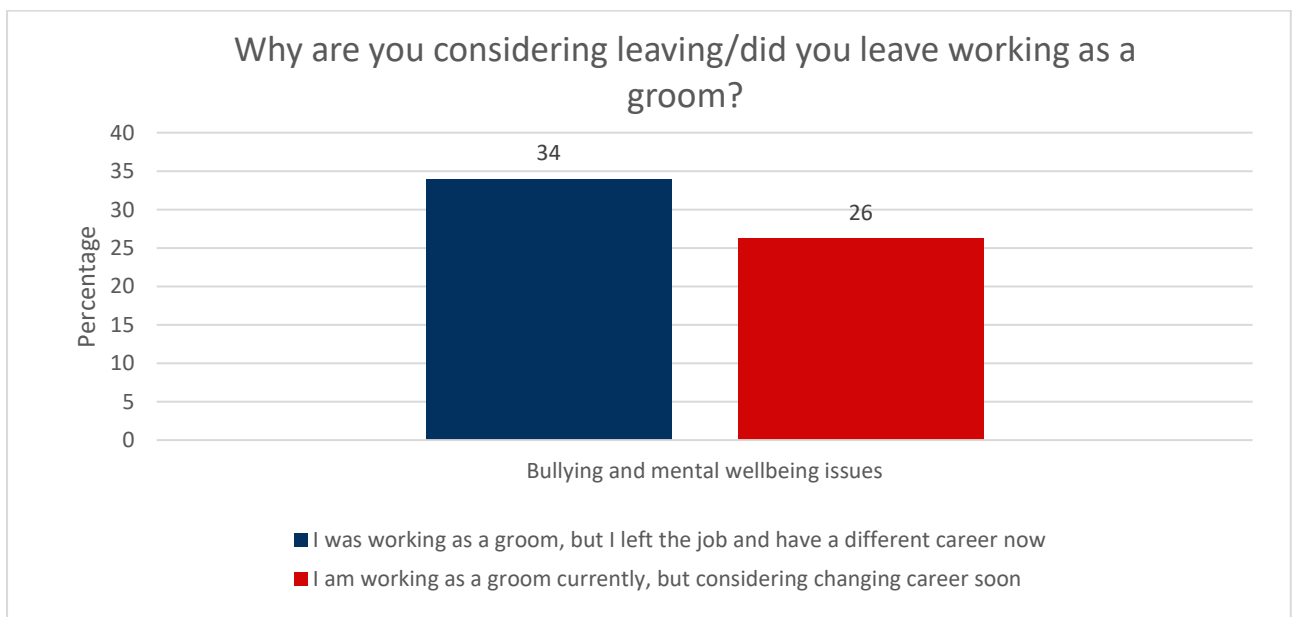


Even when grooms are being paid legally, it remains a reason why some may want to leave.

- 30% of grooms who have left working with horses did so to pursue a career where they could earn a higher wage.
- 36% of grooms considering leaving are considering doing so to pursue a career where they can earn a higher wage.
- 53% of grooms who were happy in their careers rated good pay as one of the most important issues to them.

This suggests that pay is a key issue for all grooms, especially those who are considering leaving the profession.

## BULLYING





- 34% of grooms surveyed who have left working with horses cited bullying and mental wellbeing issues.
- Over a quarter (26%) of grooms who are considering leaving working with horses are doing so due to bullying or mental wellbeing problems.

It is evident from this report, and from the BGA's recent Grooms Minds survey, that bullying and mental wellbeing issues are a problem in the equestrian profession.

It is shocking that grooms are being forced out of their career by a workplace culture that is detrimental to their mental health.

## CONCLUSION

From the results of this survey, it is clear that an urgent change of culture is needed in the equestrian profession in order to retain grooms in the workplace.

Poor employment practices are widespread, leaving a mental wellbeing legacy with grooms, and resulting in a worryingly high number of passionate and experienced staff leaving the profession, disheartened.

The simple fact is this: employers that offer good, legal employment retain their staff, and those that don't have a high turnover of employees.

In order to retain grooms, employers should consider:

- Working hours – grooms with fewer working hours are happier in their career.
- Annual leave entitlement – this is a legal entitlement and employees must be able to take it.
- Working relationship with staff – grooms who feel uncomfortable talking to their employer are less happy and more likely to consider leaving working with horses.
- Employment rights – grooms leave or consider leaving if they feel that their employment rights are being ignored. This includes written contracts and the payment of a legal and fair wage.
- Workplace culture – the culture must not be damaging to employees' mental health and bullying must not be tolerated.

The British Grooms Association (BGA) and Equestrian Employers Association (EEA) offer actionable steps that can be taken to resolve these problems of workplace retention as explained in this report.

The BGA offers extensive resources that informs groom of their rights in the workplace, and the EEA employers of what they can do to ensure a safe and legal workplace.

By following these guidelines, better employment conditions for grooms can be developed across the equestrian industry and will thus help retain experienced grooms.

Furthermore, as found in this report, the implementation of these guidelines to ensure better employment conditions for grooms may encourage grooms who have left the profession to return.

To access these resources, go to the British Grooms Association website: [www.britishgrooms.org.uk](http://www.britishgrooms.org.uk) or the Equestrian Employers Association [www.equestrianemployers.org.uk](http://www.equestrianemployers.org.uk)

## SURVEY PARTICIPANT COMMENTS

Over 230 comments were submitted with the survey. Here are just a select few:

- I left working as a groom due to bullying. In my last job the boss/yard owner made my life a living hell and I eventually decided that I couldn't bear to be treated like that and quit. Until that last job I had been very happy.
- I was fed up of being taken for granted and even though my boss wasn't awful, when it came to his attitude the bad outweighed the good.
- The pay is rubbish considering we are handling animals that could drastically change our life for the worse.
- I spent so much time looking after other people's horses that I couldn't devote any time to my own.
- I left because of the lack of training that had been promised.
- I had to pay feed bills out of my savings as they ran out of money. I wasn't paid sometimes for 2-3 months. My competition kit was used on their horses. I had to clear up their wedding when I had a yard of 28 horses to sort all by myself as all the other staff had the day off. I worked 7 days a week, 5.30am till 8pm.
- I left because I felt there was no scope for further progression.
- I was bullied by employers in 2 different jobs.
- I wasn't paid for full hours worked.
- I was undervalued and bullied. Expectations were extremely high while we were understaffed and overworked. I had no pension, no workers' rights, and the living conditions were unacceptable.
- I was exhausted from working 10-hour days, 6 days a week for £100.
- The lifestyle is hard. In winter, everything is dirty all the time – my flat; my car; myself! Horses' welfare and service provided wasn't up to my standards but there wasn't anything I could do about it. Cold, exhausted, and soaking wet: the last thing I wanted to do was ride my horse at the end of the day.
- I worked in awful conditions with a rat infestation.
- My boss found flaws in everything I did. I had a low feeling of self-worth as I felt that I couldn't do anything right or well enough.
- I was expected to work unrealistic hours. It was not possible to buy a house, get married, and have a family.
- I am no longer a groom as they hired an apprentice who was cheaper than me :(
- I wanted to ride professionally but was never going to afford the set-up on grooms' wages.
- I was injured due to my boss' negligence but had no pay while my broken bone healed and was made to feel guilty for not being able to work. I was made to feel like a farm slave. I was never paid on time.
- The horses are fabulous but they don't outweigh the bad ways you're treated.
- I've now got a 'proper' job that pays me so much more than a groom's job ever could, meaning I can afford to keep and compete 2 horses of my own: something I could never have the time or money to do as a groom.
- My boss put me off grooming for life after the way I was treated. I was devastated to leave the industry after being a professional groom for over 20 years.

- I have now set up my own business but if I did go back to being a groom I would only do it on a self-employed freelance basis so I could manage my hours, have more of a life and be more respected.
- I tried to go back to grooming when I returned to the UK after a break. I was highly experienced, qualified, and capable, had fitted and groomed up to 4\* event level, managed 4\* event yards, teams of staff and students. Yet I was being offered “privileged” working pupil positions at £70pw. It was a joke. It was so sad as one of the reasons I returned to the UK was to get back in to working with horses.
- If unscrupulous employers get removed from the industry, I'd be happy to return for a fair wage and holidays as in other industries.
- I loved working with horses. I did it for nearly 20 years but unfortunately it doesn't pay the bills. I'd work 10 to 12-hour days plus do my own horses then go home and fall asleep, so there was no life outside work. I was also constantly in pain with back problems.