



**ABRS+** SINCE 1954, THE ABRS+ HAS BEEN THE ONLY ASSOCIATION DEDICATED TO REPRESENTING EQUESTRIAN ESTABLISHMENTS. THE ABRS+ CERTIFIED AND APPROVED SCHEMES FOR RIDING ESTABLISHMENTS, LIVERY YARDS AND EQUESTRIAN CENTRES OFFER A HALLMARK OF QUALITY, PROMOTE PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS AND PROVIDE SUPPORT FROM A TRUSTED ASSOCIATION.

Article by Cheryl Johns, ABRS+ Trustee

## COVID 'LEARNING EFFECT' FOR EQUESTRIAN ESTABLISHMENTS

**T**he past fifteen months have been a tumultuous time for the equestrian industry, in particular the disruption to riding establishments and livery yards. The Coronavirus pandemic saw restrictions on owners being able to visit their horses - deemed 'non-essential' if on a serviced livery package, and riding schools and other riding establishments, such as trekking centres relying on tourism, having to close their doors with no sight in end to the business disruption.

Many livery yards were also faced with an exodus of clients seeking cheaper livery packages, or having their clients fall behind with their payments due to reduction of incomes, and most riding schools had to shut in full with a complete loss of income, yet having the continuing cost of caring for horses on the yard. Despite equestrian associations like British Equestrian and the ABRS+ lobbying hard to seek clarity and financial support for their members, those who

managed to battle on were faced with complicated rules, sanitary protocols and a backlash from clients who felt interpretations of the government guidelines were excessive and unfair. We all remember the confusion that arose with the rules on 'caring for pets' and 'exercise', and the sheer lack of clarity and the confusion over eligibility for government financial support led to even further complication and stress for business owners. However, it appears that the residual effects of Covid are not all bad! The necessity for additional health and safety considerations, cutting costs and record keeping has resonated with the owners of many equestrian establishments who are keeping a number of their new protocols in place which they feel improves how they manage their business and deal with clients.

One of the main aspects is to continue monitoring - or even limiting - visitors, be it friends or family accompanying riding pupils and horse owners, or even

sharers and equestrian professionals. Many also brought in allocated time slots, prebooking and rules on the provision of services by the yard or third parties, that they are intending to continue with. The requirement of recording professionals visiting yards and verifying the provision of services within the scope of 'essential care' - such as requesting copies of insurance or qualifications from instructors, freelance grooms and therapists - revealed that some were operating without the necessary insurance or professional registrations. Covid has also helped many yard owners understand the importance of biosecurity in equine terms too, and that

limiting access to the premises and equines also reduces the risk of cross-contamination for equine diseases. The benefit of recording details of pupils and livery clients - such as livery contracts, client and horse details forms - has also become a clear advantage to ensure sufficient contact details of anyone who may be on the premises and clarification of arrangements for horses in their care.

So although Covid has been a stressful time, we're nearly out of the woods now and it's actually been a positive learning curve for many, despite the dramatic way in which it has forcibly come about!

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