



LICENSING GUIDANCE

What is licensing?



Local Authorities (which includes the term 'Council') in **England**, **Scotland** and **Wales** are responsible for issuing licences to businesses that hire out horses. In Northern Ireland, licences are issued by the Divisional Veterinary Office.

Licenses are granted through a process of application (by the operator of the business) and inspection (by a suitably qualified inspector). Licensing is intended to confirm that the operator of the business has the competence, processes and facilities necessary to assure the welfare of the horses that are used by the business.

Local Authorities are responsible also for enforcing other regulations (for example: health, fire, environmental and food safety, consumer protection and planning). Thus, although licensing is specifically focussed on animal welfare, Local Authorities may also use the licensing inspection as an opportunity to examine other areas of the business to confirm compliance across this wider suite of regulation.

The information provided on this page, and subsequent pages, is offered as advice and not authoritative guidance. You must ensure that you are familiar with relevant national legislation and regulation, and we recommend that you review any specific guidance provided by your Local Authority (normally on their website).

What are the Legislation and Regulations?



Riding Establishments in **England**, **Scotland** and **Wales** are required by law to be licensed by local authorities under the Riding Establishments Acts 1964 and 1970. These laws have been supplement by:

- **England**: the Licensing of Activities Involving Animals (England) Regulations 2018.
- **Scotland**: the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006.

Riding Establishments in **Northern Ireland** are licensed under Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 and Riding Establishments Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1980.

Statutory Guidance (which sets out minimum criteria for licensing) and Codes of Practice (which provide a practical guide for owners and keepers of horses) have been issued in **England** and **Scotland**:

- **England:**
 - Hiring out horses licensing: statutory guidance for local authorities – February 22
 - Code of Practice for the Welfare of Horses, Ponies, Donkeys and Their Hybrids
- **Scotland:**
 - Each Local Authority issues its own guidance, which is normally available through their website
 - Code of Practise for the Welfare of Equidae

While the Legislation, Regulations and Codes of Practise do differ across the nations of the United Kingdom, their intent is the same - to assure the welfare of horses that are hired out by businesses.

Links to the Legislation and Regulations can be found in the Resources Area of the ABRs+ website.

Do I need a licence?

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You require a licence if you are business that hires out horses for riding and/or instruction in riding. This could include:

- Riding schools
- Loan horses
- Hunter hirelings
- Pony and donkey rides
- Polo instruction
- Pony parties where the ponies are ridden

Pony party businesses that use ponies that are not ridden must be licensed as Keeping or Training Animals for Exhibition Licence (England) or Performing Animals Regulations (Scotland and Wales).

You are a business if your activities are intended to make a profit, earn commission or result in fees. You are not a business if:

- You occasionally lend a horse, even if a small fee is charged, where there is no profit or intent to make a profit.
- Your income from trading is less than £1000.
- Your activities are solely for military/police purposes or for instructing veterinary students as a part of a university course.

The term 'horse' is an inclusive term that covers wide variety of equine descriptive names, including mare, gelding, pony, foal, colt, filly, stallion, donkey, ass, mule, jennet and hinny.

Your Local Authority is responsible for determining whether you fall within the regulations and require a licence. If you are not sure whether you need a licence, you should contact your Local Authority licensing team for advice.

How do I apply for a licence?

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You must apply for a Licence through your Local Authority using the process described on their Website. To do so, you will need to complete their Application Form which you will either fill in and submit on-line, or download for submission by post or email.

You must apply and be granted a licence before commencing licensable activities. If you already have a licence, you should apply for re-licensing before your existing licence terminates and allowing sufficient time (~3 months) for your Local Authority to complete the re-licensing process.

The information required by Local Authorities at application does vary but typically will include:

- Details about the Applicant.
- Details about the Applicant's business.
- Information about the Riding Establishment to be licensed.
- Information on stabling, grazing and other associated facilities.
- Details of the horses that will be hired for riding and/or instruction.
- Information on who will manage the Riding Establishment and on what basis they are competent to do so.
- Details of the veterinary surgeon used by the Riding Establishment.
- Details of the Public Liability Insurance held.
- Details of any disqualifications or convictions associated with animal welfare.

Before applying for a licence, you should ensure that you have the required planning permission to use the premises as a riding establishment, to erect new stables or other buildings on the site, and/or have obtained Permission for Change of Use.

How much will the Licence cost?

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The Regulations allow Local Authorities to charge fees for licensing (including application, inspection and enforcement) but that these fees should be 'reasonable'.

The structure of fees and the amounts payable varies by Local Authority. Some Local Authorities require the full fee to be paid on application, while others charge a smaller fee on application and make a further charge for the issue of the licence. In addition to the application and/or issuing charges, a re-occurring Annual Fee may also be levied when a multi-year licence is issued. Additional charges are normally levied for re-inspection and for varying the licence (for example, the addition or removal of named horses from the licence). Veterinary fees are normally an additional charge and are normally invoiced separately.

The specific fees that you will need to pay will be detailed on your Local Authority Website.

What does an inspection for a licence involve?

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Once you have applied for a licence and paid any associated fees, where these are required, you will be provided with an inspection date by your Local Authority.

The inspection will be carried out by a suitably qualified inspector appointed by the Local Authority, accompanied by a listed veterinarian, or a listed veterinarian who has been appointed as an inspector by the Local Authority.

The Local Authority has legal responsibilities that extend into areas such as Health and Safety, Building Regulations, Safeguarding and others. Although the licensing inspection will focus on the welfare of the horses, the inspector may also seek evidence that other legal requirements are being met.

The inspection will comprise:

- A review of documents and records that demonstrate that you have, are and will comply with relevant legislation and regulations.
- An inspection of the horses, tack, premises and facilities to confirm adequacy of care and suitability for use.

Some Local Authorities are willing to conduct pre-inspection advisory visits. Where this is offered, the service will be identified on their Website. Where it is not explicitly offered, you can call your Local Authority licensing team to determine whether pre-licensing support is available.

The ABRS offer an [Advisory Service](#). We can provide practical advice and guidance to members and support them through the licensing process.

What documents and records do I need to present?

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To satisfy the licensing requirements, you will need to have written policies, procedures and plans that describe how you run your business on a day-to-day basis. These will need to be supplemented by specific records that provide objective evidence of activities performed, events occurred and/or results achieved.

- **Policies** provide guidelines and principles that describe how you wish for decisions to be made within your business:
- **Procedures** describe how you run your business on a day-to-day basis. They allow someone who is new to your business to know how things are done
- **Plans** set out specific actions that are intended to achieve a specific aim
- **Records** are documents (in paper or digital form) that provide objective evidence of activities performed, events occurred, results achieved or statements made

You are required to retain and present records for the last three years (and in some specific cases for 5 years). Where you are unable to do so (for example, where your business is new), this will not prevent you gaining a licence but may impact on the length of licence granted.

Your Local Authority may ask that some documents and records be submitted with your Application. This will be detailed on their Website or Application Form. Their Inspector will review documents and records during the inspection.

The documents and records required for the licence and to satisfy the broader suite of regulation can be grouped into four areas: Safety, Staff, Horse Care and Client. Guidance, Policies, Procedures and Templates can be found in the ABRs+ Member's Area.

How long does a licence last?

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If you are located in [Scotland](#), [Wales](#) and Northern Ireland, your licence must be renewable annually.

If you are located in [England](#), your business will be assigned a business risk rating (low or higher risk) and a star rating (between 1 and 5 stars). Depending on your risk rating and star rating, your licence will be valid for 1, 2 or 3 years:

Risk Matrix		Welfare standards		
		Minor failings	Minimum standards	Higher standards
Business Risk	Low Risk	1 star 1 year licence	3 star 2 year licence	5 star 3 year licence
	Higher Risk	1 star 1 year licence	2 star 1 year licence	4 star 2 year licence

How is my business risk determined?

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Business Risk is an assessment of the likelihood that compliance will be maintained satisfactorily into the future. New businesses that do not have three years of compliance history with a local authority will automatically be considered high risk as they have no operational history.

Risk scoring table	Low (score 1 points)	High (score 2 points)
Compliance history		
Inspections	Documented evidence from formal inspections over the previous three years reveal consistent and high levels of compliance in terms of welfare standards and risk management	Formal inspections over the previous three years reveal some degree of non-compliance that has required the intervention of the inspector for the business to ultimately recognise and address these. More serious breaches would attract other enforcement action: suspension, revocation, prosecution.

Risk scoring table	Low (score 1 points)	High (score 2 points)
Follow up action	No evidence of follow-up action by local authority in the last year apart from providing the licence holder with a copy of the inspection report, or sending them a letter identifying some minor, administrative areas for improvement (for example minor record keeping issues)	Follow up action by the local authority, such as sending them letters, triggered by low level non-compliance that is not addressed, or the business does not recognise the significance of the need to address the non-compliance.
Re-inspection	No re-inspection necessary (apart from standard unannounced inspection) before next planned licence inspection / renewal	Re-inspection necessary to ensure compliance.
Complaint history		
Complaints to the Local Authority	No complaints received direct to the LA that are justified in relation to welfare standards or procedural issues during the previous three years	Low level substantiated complaints identifying concerns over the business / licence holder have been received within the previous three years.
Complaints to the business	Licence holder records and documents any feedback received directly, in order to demonstrate compliance and willingness to address issues, and can provide evidence of this	Licence holder does not record feedback received directly or show willingness to address any issues identified.
Appreciation of:		
Welfare standards - enrichment	Sound understanding by the licence holder of relevant environmental enrichment applicable to the activity (guided by expert advice), with demonstrated implementation	Little environmental enrichment present, inconsistently used and its importance not understood or really valued.
Hazards/risks	Licence holder clearly understands their role and responsibilities under the legislation. Hazards to both staff and animals clearly understood, properly controlled and reviewed with supporting evidence where applicable.	Licence holder not fully engaged with their role/responsibilities, lacks time to fulfil role, no system for review and reassessment of hazards to both animals and staff.
Hazards/risks - maintenance	A suitably planned maintenance, repair and replacement program for infrastructure and equipment is in place.	No planned maintenance program. Building, installations and equipment allowed to deteriorate before action is implemented.
Hazards/risks - knowledge and experience	Staff have specialist and appropriate knowledge of the taxa / species that are kept. There is sufficient staff, time and resource for daily, adequate	Key staff lack experience / knowledge of the species. Staff appear overburdened and / or unsupported by management, corners being cut.

Risk scoring table	Low (score 1 points)	High (score 2 points)
	routine monitoring, evidenced through records and staff rotas.	
Hazards/risks - dealing with issues	Clear defined roles / responsibilities of staff, with clear processes for reporting and addressing any identified issues.	Lack of any process, or ownership and responsibility within the business to identify and deal with issues.
Welfare management procedures		
Written procedures	Written procedures / policies clearly documented, implemented and reviewed appropriately.	Limited written procedures / policies. No overall strategic control or direction.
Supervision of Staff	Appropriate supervision of staff evident where applicable.	Inadequate supervision of staff evident on inspecting or from the training records.
Record keeping	All required records maintained and made available.	Poor standard of record keeping, records out of date or appear to be being manufactured - relevance of records not appreciated.
Training	Planned training programme for staff to review and assess competency, with documented training records.	Little or no evidence of relevant training or system for review and reassessment.
A score of 17 or less = Low risk. A score of 18 or more = Higher risk.		

How is the level of welfare standard determined?

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In **England**, the 'specific' and the 'general' welfare standards that you are required to meet are set out in the 'Guidance notes for conditions for hiring out horses – February 2022'. You can use our self-assessment checklist in the ABRS+ Member's Area to check your compliance against the specific and general standards and to plan your remedial actions where you do not comply. The Guidance Notes and Checklist can be found in the Resources Area of the ABRS+ website. You must meet the standards as follows:

- **Minimum standards:**

You must meet minimum standards set out in the guidance documents.

- **Minor failings:**

A licence will be issued as the failings are normally only administrative. A licence is not issued or will be suspended or revoked where the welfare of animals may be compromised.

- **Higher standards:**

There are two types of higher standard: 'required' and 'optional'. To apply the higher standards, businesses need to achieve all of the 'required' higher standards and 50 per cent of the 'optional' higher standards. Meeting the higher standards is optional but is the only way to gain a higher star rating. A business must meet the minimum standards before the higher standards can be considered.

To obtain a 4 or 5 Star rating, **all** of the criteria below must be met:

- There must be an option for a permanent individual turn out paddock/pen to allow horses their own area for grazing/turnout if required owing to ill-health or domination by other horses
- Horses must be inspected at least once during the out-of-hours period (e.g. 1800-0800)
- All horses must have a structured management and care programme to include their exercise needs with suitable alternatives for those unable to exercise, such as additional grooming, physiotherapy etc
- Each horse will have its own specific care plan detailing age and any health-related conditions
- Records must evidence individual monitoring and training plans for horses in connection with individual training needs to complement their use within a riding school. This must be accompanied by evidence of regular and effective checks with saddler for comfort and fit
- Initial assessments must be undertaken for new riders and details of assessment recorded
- Documented risk assessment must be available for all such equipment, for example horse clippers, horse walkers, yard blowers, arena levelling equipment and any additional therapy-based machines or equipment
- Documented risk assessment must be available for activities, including PPE requirements that include the appropriateness of PPE relative to different tasks and situations.

3 of the 5 criteria below must also be met:

- Horses will not be in reach of each other to bite and there will be room to work around them. Horses will be in view of each other, unless kept singly for management reasons, such as isolation or stallion management purposes
- There must be a separate secure, clean and well-lit veterinary inspection area that enables safe access to allow inspection of a horse
- There must be a separate well-lit, lockable, purpose-built feed room with water available and additional storage for supplements
- A competent person must be on-site at all times
- Independent specialist nutritional advice must be sought as appropriate for individual horses and documented alongside the weekly body condition scoring. Records must evidence individual health plans and monitoring for horses in connection with dietary requirements. There must be legible and up-to-date feed chart on display that informs correct feeding amounts for individual horses.

In [Scotland](#) and [Wales](#), there is no centrally issued Guidance Notes. Some Local Authorities publish their own guidance notes on their websites. If these are not available, you should consult your Local Authority Licensing Inspector. In general, however, the Guidance Notes used in England and the ABRs+ guides are a good guide to the standards that are likely to be required.

What do I do if I am refused a licence or are unhappy with the Conditions or Star Rating? +

You have the right to appeal if you are refused a licence, are unhappy with any conditions imposed or think your star rating is wrong. You should check your Local Authority website to confirm when and how you lodge an appeal.

You may also be able to request for a re-visit where you have made the improvements to correct observations that arose during the inspection. If your Local Authority offers this service, they will normally charge an associated fee.

Will I be inspected during the period of the licence? +

The Local Authority have the right to inspect a Riding Establishment at any time to confirm that the conditions of the licence are not being breached.

In [England](#), the Local Authority is required to carry out one unannounced inspection during the term of the licence.