

Equine Identification: A Broken System



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Foreword

David Mountford – Chair of British Horse Council

This report, commissioned by the British Horse Council (BHC), seeks to shed light on what stakeholders, particularly horse owners, think of the UK's current equine identification system and how they think a digital replacement might work. The findings paint a picture of an existing structure that is costly, onerous, fragmented and open to abuse (intentional or otherwise). The findings also indicate that there is strong support for a move to a secure modern digitised system.

It has been shown that large swathes of the data currently held on the Central Equine Database (CED), and therefore an unacceptable proportion of the data held by the passport issuers, is inaccurate or incomplete. Our report indicates that this flawed data reflects the complexity of the current equine identification system, with its costs, administrative burdens, lack of evident benefits, and absence of enforcement.

Our report further demonstrates stakeholder support for the creation of a simple and accessible (digital) equine identification system. It describes the need for the system to provide palpable benefits for horse owners and it recognises that Government and industry need to collaborate to ensure compliance. The report also highlights that some stakeholders have concerns over the security of digital records, however, the existing paper system is demonstrably prone to abuse, and we believe that a digital system can offer significantly enhanced protection.

Accurate data on the UK's equine population is critical for health, welfare and trade. An effective system will allow for enhanced disease surveillance, improved disease outbreak control, speedy return of lost or stolen horses, enforcement of current food safety legislation and reliable welfare controls that will hold accountable those responsible for suffering. An accurate system also holds the promise of simplified and biosecure movements for sport and national/international trade.

Brexit has provided an opening for Great Britain to lead the world with a modern equine identification system that enhances horse health, welfare and trade; this report describes the stakeholder support for capitalising on the opportunity.



Executive summary

The British Horse Council's online survey was launched on 12 April 2022 and closed on 30 May 2022 and set out to understand "What Does the Future Look Like for Managing Horse Passports and Horse Information?"

The survey had 3,424 responses, the majority of which were from horse owners who care for more than one horse. Over three quarters of respondents were over forty years of age and most of these live in England. This is as expected, as the majority of people in the UK live in England, and the response rate from each country in the UK roughly aligns with the general population split between them.

Specific sections were included on breeding/pedigree (28% had an interest), enforcement (62% responded), passporting, microchipping and compliance as well as questions about respondent location, horse location and views on challenges created by having differing devolved government identification regulations.

The goal was to establish an evidence base specifically derived from horse owners who are the "end users" of horse identification systems. It identified both quantitative and qualitative data (6,915 individual comments) on how the people who have a responsibility for complying with the law are, or are not, managing to do so. The majority (up to 90% in most cases) strongly agreed or agreed on the health, welfare and other benefits offered by a simplified online/digital or App-based system, with many voicing that paper documents could provide "back up". The proposal of "digital first" wasn't specifically explored but either digital or paper has to be the primary record, and the balance of public opinion was in favour of digital.

The results from this survey largely complement those obtained by the consultation held by Defra as well as revealing additional insights. Regarding the number of Passport Issuing Organisations, 72% felt there should be fewer. Regarding paper passports, over 87% were concerned about loss in the post. Concerning different legal requirements for horse passports across UK countries, 63% were concerned and 24% felt that it was crucial to share information easily and quickly between countries.

The direction provided by the generous respondents to this survey speaks clearly that changes are needed in order to be able to deliver on the identification, traceability, health and welfare benefits which were highlighted.

About this research

This report details research undertaken by the British Horse Council (BHC). The BHC collaborated with research scientists to develop questions that get to the heart of respondents' experiences of the current equine identification (more commonly known as horse passport) system and their views on future adaptations which might simplify processes and make it easier for horse owners to be compliant with the law. When we asked about the "horse passport system" we meant the process of managing horse identification in line with the current regulation; getting a microchip, applying for a paper "horse passport" through one of 70+ Passport Issuing Organisations (PIO), getting passports updated when horses are bought or sold and confidence in enforcement. In parallel with the formal Government consultation, the aim of the study was to obtain information specifically from a horse owner perspective, using a simple online survey.

About this survey

The survey was initially promoted using social media channels shared by participants who attend British Horse Council meetings. The promotional posts and survey links were then shared more widely by interested parties using their own chosen methods. The UK national equestrian media picked up the story which resulted in a boost in responses.

The survey generated 3,424 responses from the United Kingdom (see Figure 1 for a geographical breakdown of the location of the respondents). Only 24 of respondents (1%) were located in Northern Ireland, too few for a meaningful analysis; this report will therefore concentrate on Great Britain – with the intent to revisit Northern Ireland in the future.

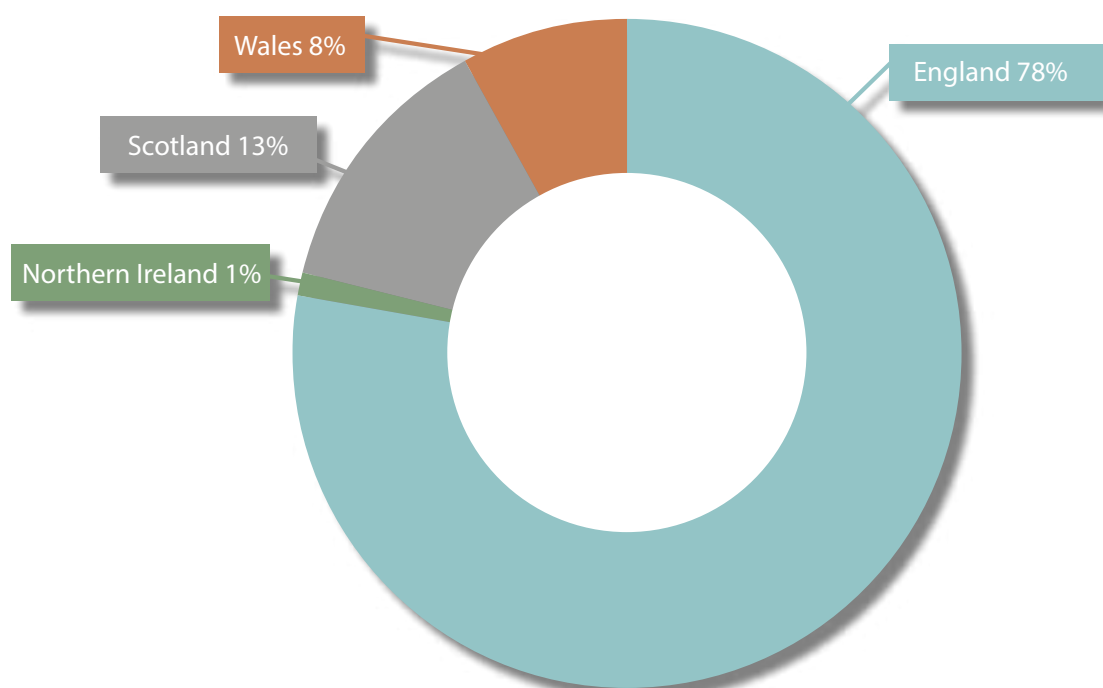


Figure 1: Geographical breakdown of the location of respondents from the United Kingdom, with the percentage of each country shown (rounded to the nearest whole number).

Over 90% of those who responded from Great Britain identified as horse owners or carers, with remaining respondents identifying themselves as involved with equines via an equine profession. Over 60% of respondents were over the age of 50 (see Figure 2 below for the demographic breakdown).

The survey's questions offered a number of statements on the current horse passport system, potential changes to the system and benefits of an effective system. There were two optional subsets of questions on enforcement and breeding. The majority of questions yielded both quantitative and qualitative data; 6,915 free text responses were generated. High level thematic analysis was undertaken and there is potential for more detailed analysis of the comprehensive responses provided by recipients, within the constraints of the publicly stated purpose of the survey.

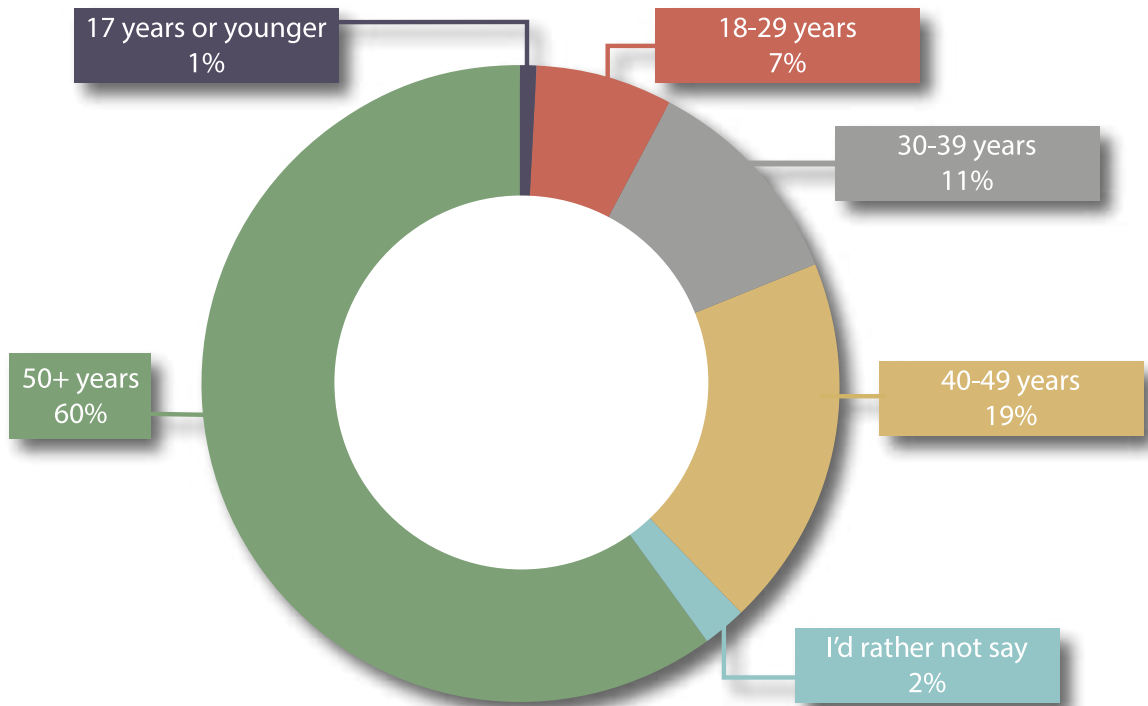


Figure 2: Age demographic breakdown of respondents, with the percentage of each age bracket shown (rounded to the nearest whole number).

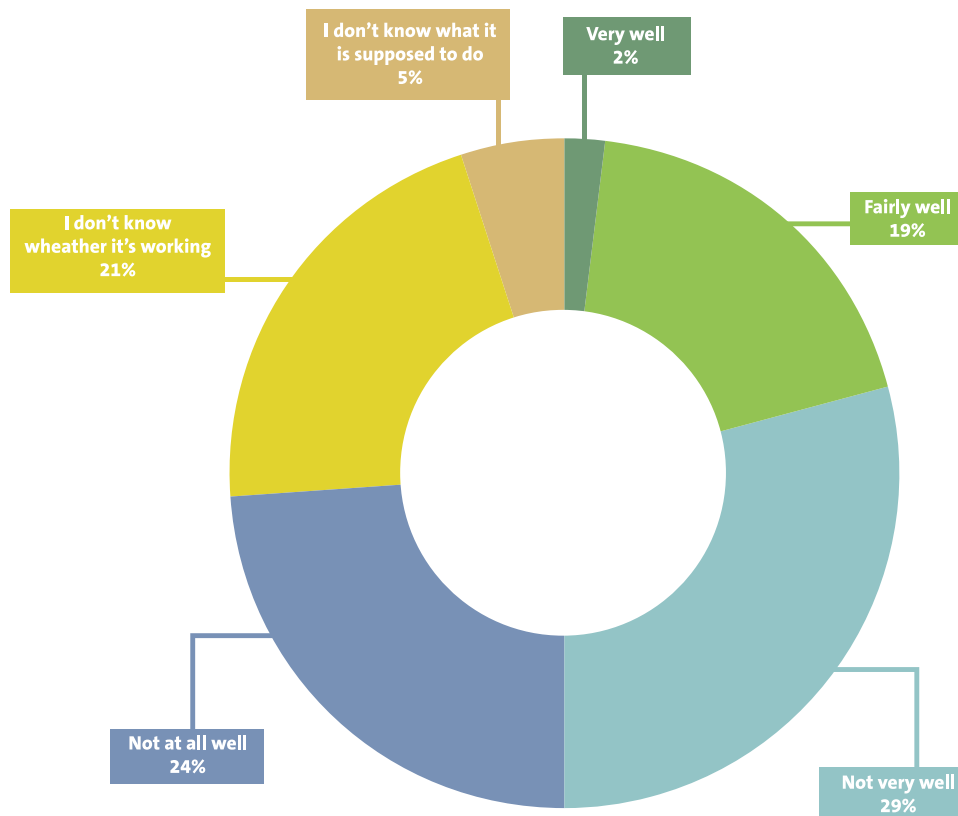
Chapter 1

Views on the current system

Not working well

Only 1 in 5 respondents thought the current horse passport system was working well (2% very well and 19% fairly well). Over a fifth of respondents didn't know whether it was or whether it wasn't working well, signalling that their engagement with it is low and a combination of simplification and better communication would be required.

How well do you think the current horse passport system is working?

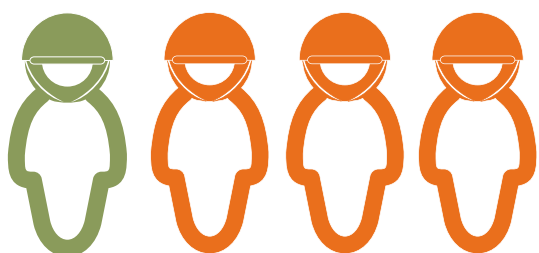


Updating passports is a nightmare due to the number of different passport issuing agencies and the different way each one expects ownership to be updated. Some are free and involve online amendments, others require a fee and for you to send the passport away to be updated. The last few horses I have owned have all not had recent changes in ownership updated. The current system is not fit for purpose.



More communication needed

While the majority of owners had microchipped and passported their horses, this was only part of the story. A significant number were not aware of their legal obligation to keep their and their horse's details up to date by notifying a PIO. This was particularly true for individuals whose horses had been passported by a PIO based outside the UK. Respondents believed that they were fully compliant because they had updated the overseas PIO, without realising that this would not fulfil the requirements of the UK.



Only 1 in 4 horse owners think that horse passport laws have been communicated well



My horse is registered in Ireland, so I have answered based on that experience as am assuming the process to be similar for UK. I hear so many tales of passports being non-existent or unreliable/altered that I wonder whether horse passporting as it stands is valid/policed at all. My own horse's passport is up to date and kept where he is kept. I only knew about requirements anecdotally and am not aware of seeing info on any horse journal etc to educate.



Having to get [...] passports overstamped was a nightmare, I was without my horse's passport for almost 2 months while they sorted out what needed to happen. If even the PIOs don't know what's going on, how are ordinary people meant to know?



I'm not 100% sure what horse passports are for. System doesn't appear to be properly enforced with regards to updating them when a horse changes hands.



* Where individual organisations have been named by respondents, these have been anonymised, indicated by [...].

Costly, complicated and takes too long

Others reported not updating their details due to cost, fear of losing their passport and/or finding the process drawn-out and difficult.



Only 1 in 4 felt that passport processing was done in a timely fashion



I waited 3 months to have my passport returned after change of ownership and it came back with someone else's address. A year later still waiting on it being resolved as no one returns my calls.



It took my last passport 2 months to be returned and that was paying for fastrack, which is too long. I had to phone and request it be returned as it was an emergency and I needed it back.



Only 1 in 5 disagreed that it was expensive



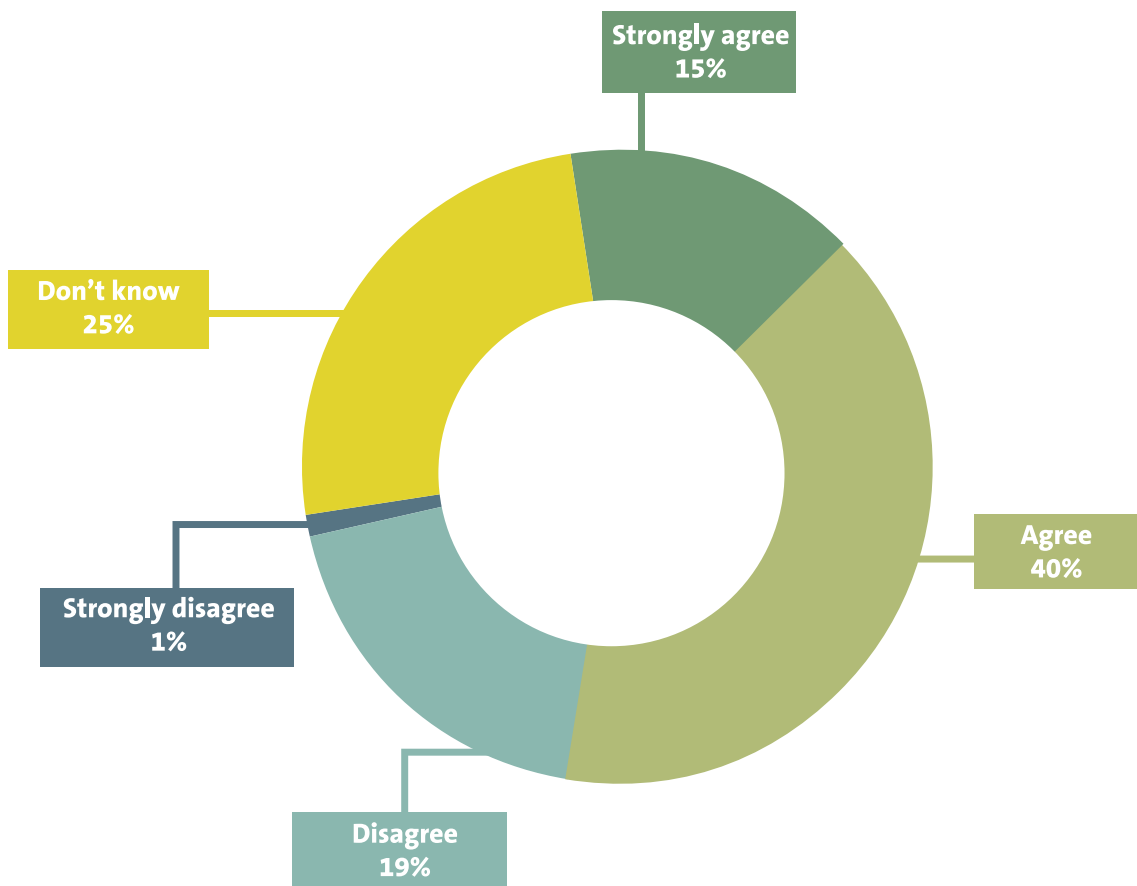
From my own experience I can tell you it took over 5 weeks for a passport to get updated by the [...]. Too long, as I was waiting to sell the horse.



More than 4 out of 5 respondents thought that sending horse passports away in the post risks them getting lost

We asked: Thinking about the horse passport system, please indicate how you feel about the following statements.

Statement: Returning horse passports to have them updated is expensive

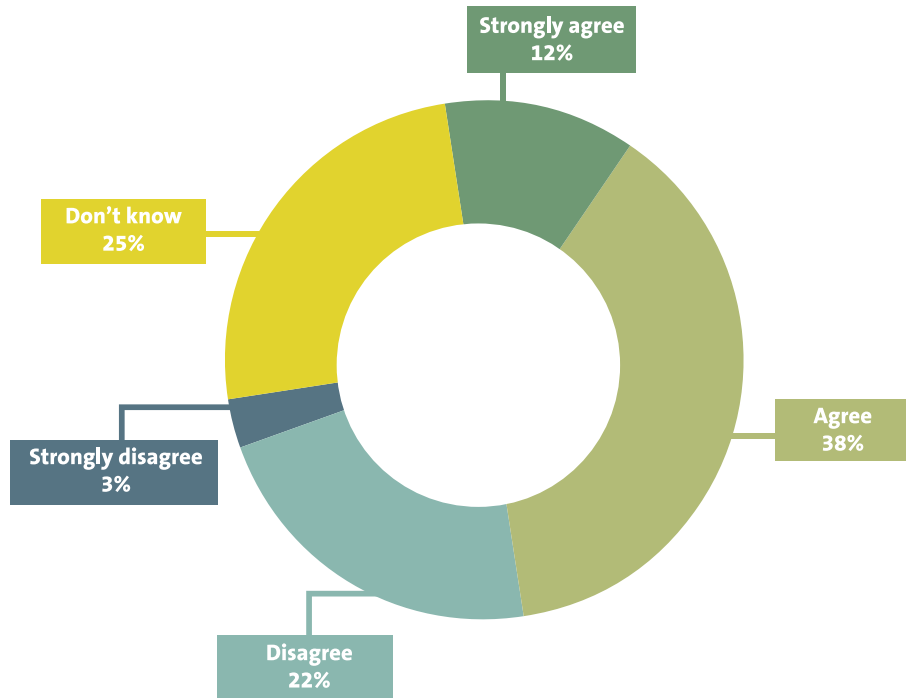


The passport system is expensive and over complex. Requirements are not generally followed in the horse world, particularly on change of owner and on imported horses. The only people really following the rules are “good owners”. The rest flout the rules and always will.



We asked: Thinking about the horse passport system, please indicate how you feel about the following statements.

Statement: It takes too long for horse passport changes to be processed



It's a complete joke. Most horse passports I have, have literally no previous owner details in them because it's too expensive and takes too long to get the details updated.

Even when they are, you find out the passport people haven't actually updated it properly on the main database!

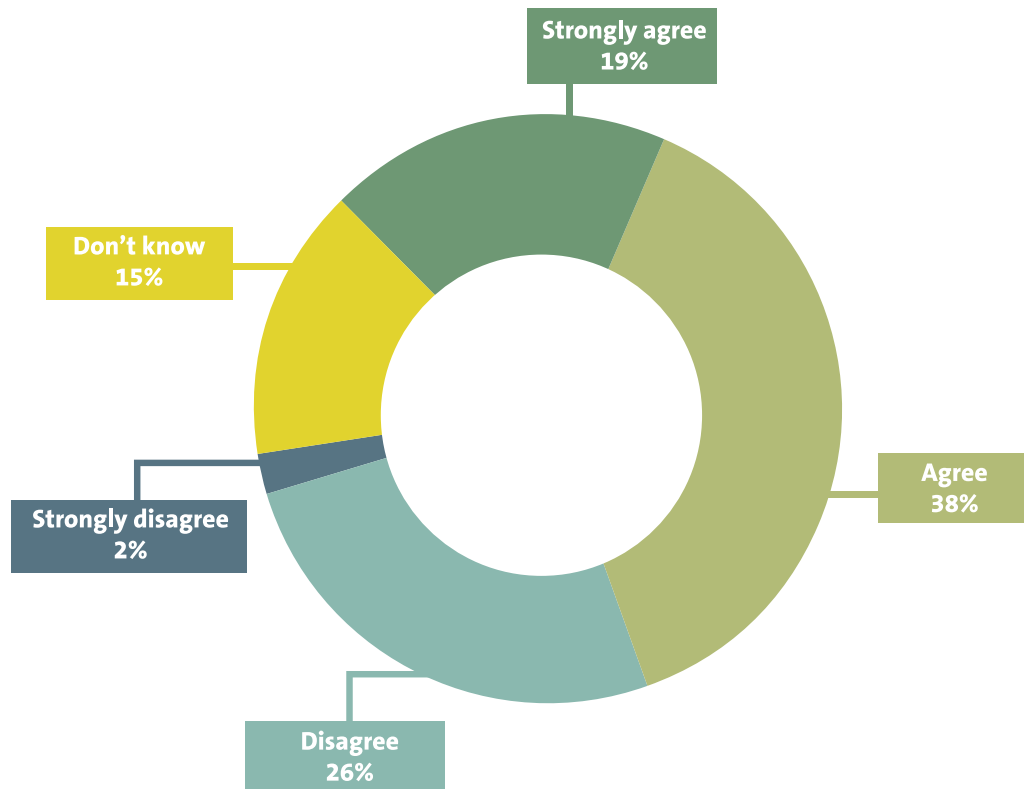


As a manager for an Animal Rescue the whole process is expensive, time consuming, and most of all, risky. As a charity having to pay special delivery postage and fast track for passports to be returned at a decent amount of time, with NO concessions available from most agencies, it's about time the whole system was updated, and allow online updating.



We asked: Thinking about the horse passport system, please indicate how you feel about the following statements.

Statement: The whole horse passport process is too complicated



I don't think the concept is complex but the practical and logistical arrangements are.



As I said in the comments earlier, it is the PIOs and breed societies you should be looking at, which make the whole registration process cumbersome, expensive and unpleasant. That needs sorting out and horse passporting will vastly improve.



While the passport is not recognised as proof of ownership, previous owner details being out of date was highlighted by a number of people when buying a horse. Some had been required to trace back to the last known owner recorded in the passport before details would be updated by the PIO. The last known owner was often the breeder, even though the horse may have been owned by multiple people since the breeder sold the horse. The impediments to making updates, as illustrated by respondents, indicate that **the system has too much friction to be fit for purpose.**

All horses across the UK must be passported, by law, before they reach a year of age. Some horses can change substantially as they age meaning that the description in their passport can differ significantly from the appearance of the adult horse. Given the barriers identified to updating owner details, it is perhaps unsurprising that the survey identified that equine details are not updated as they age.

With identification and ownership details so out of date in passports and in the databases of PIOs, the value of a central database is lost.



Fragmented

Some respondents, with horses of specific breeds, highlighted that they were happy with the service provided by the PIO, or PIOs, they use. However, a greater number brought up the confusion caused by having multiple PIOs along with a lack of standardisation and/or consistency between them. Many provided this information on an unsolicited basis, because the specific question regarding the number of PIOs was not asked until later in the survey.



Updating passports is a nightmare due to the number of different passport issuing agencies and the different way each one expects ownership to be updated. Some are free and involve online amendments, others require a fee and for you to send the passport away to be updated.



I think it is unclear for new owners how the passport and microchipping system work. I bought a pony and didn't realise I should have been given a passport (it was believed to be lost). When I realised, I got one from an organisation and was later told that this is not valid because it has to be with the original passport issuing organisation. The original microchip and passport information held is completely inaccurate (wrong colour and age), yet allegedly this is more valid than her current one.



Open to abuse

Fraud was a key concern raised by respondents, including the opportunities for horses to be issued with two passports (the original and then a duplicate and/or replacement), their details to be 'lost' and passports of deceased horses to be reused when they are not returned to PIOs as the law currently requires.

The word "fraud" was mentioned in almost all sections where a free text option was available. Respondents provided detailed case studies, relating experiences of passports being reused following death, duplicates applied-for to change food chain status, past history or age. There is a strong feeling that **the current system is too open to abuse** (intentionally or otherwise) and it therefore has questionable benefit.



The passport process is not difficult, but the cost of updates and changes varies across the different organisations. The rules concerning passports are outdated and require an update to provide better traceability. There is literally no traceability from the passports and too many fraudulent issues can occur using the current system. What is needed is one single database where all PIO's need to upload their data. People should be able to do simple address changes etc. online via this single database, which would then communicate with the relevant PIO's. As a breeder of endangered horses I don't want to see the individual PIO's lost as they have valuable breed specific data, but there must be better communication between these agencies. For example, if a horse is stolen, it may get flagged on its individual PIO database as stolen, however a second passport can be obtained from one of the generic PIO's with very little checks carried out - this is not secure because of lack of communication.



Copies need to be kept online so if lost/stolen the horse's full history is on the replacement. There are too many dealers who are applying for lost passports hiding previous owners, medical history and in cases age of horse. I know of 3 cases recently where horses have been PTS on replacement passports.



No clear benefit

Another barrier highlighted by respondents was that they see no clear value of the horse passports to them, or their equine(s). Many see them as an administrative burden and a cost.



Feels like a paper exercise. Never requested at the vets, competition venues etc.



Updating passports feels like a layer of pointless bureaucracy and I tend to forget to do it. The vaccine record part is good though.



I think making passports simpler would be good or online version or scrapping them if they cannot be monitored etc. I know no one has ever checked my youngster's passport for her markings or scanned her chip since it was placed. Nor has the transport company that has moved her twice asked to see her passport either. Only for vaccines. Waste of time if you ask me.



Sending them away is difficult and a waste of resources. Put it all online as a viable alternative.



Do away with passports altogether, complete waste of time and money.



It appears that many respondents were not aware of the Central Equine Database (CED) and the role that PIOs play in updating it, meaning many do not realise there is a central place to check the details held against an equine's microchip if they are lost or stolen. If owners are to spend their time and money updating a system, they want to be able to trust in its integrity and feel some direct positive personal impact.



My limited experience hasn't shown any benefits for me as a horse owner other than a central place to hold vaccination information.



It's not clear to leisure owners like myself what the objective of the passport system is. Is it breeding, proof of ownership and tracking, or health? What benefit is there to me as an owner to have a valid passport and vaccination record?



Honestly, I've had horses for 40 years and never come into contact with anyone who has had contact from the local authorities to check horse passports. How should they be benefiting both horses and owners and therefore how should local authorities be acting in order to ensure they meet this purpose - I'm unclear.



“

The horse passport system is a nightmare - too many PIOs - too much of a scattergun approach - unregulated and ad hoc and as a result equines are not protected against disease, crime, abuse and trafficking. The system doesn't protect the human food chain either because medicine administered is not correctly recorded. The current equine ID system is unenforceable and offers little or no protection for the horse. The use of paper passports is obsolete and open to fraud.

”



Chapter 2

Enforcement –
views on current
system and
opportunities
for improvement



Better enforcement is needed to grow confidence in the current system

Although responding to the section on enforcement was optional, 2,136 people (over 60%) chose to answer these questions.

86%

of respondents feel that enforcement of the horse passport is not effective



Issues surrounding uncompliant people are not currently dealt with as a priority - it is time consuming, local authorities don't have the time/money/power to enforce. If everyone who doesn't comply is not penalised or corrected, there is no real point to having the system. Similarly, if responsible owners don't find the system easy and financially feasible, there is a greater risk of incorrect or absent records. Again, this makes it pointless, and it is much needed in order to reduce the number of illegal/unscrupulous breeding activities, trading, diseases etc.



94% of respondents agreed that is unclear who enforcement concerns should be reported to

2% agreed that local authorities are good at following up enforcement complaints

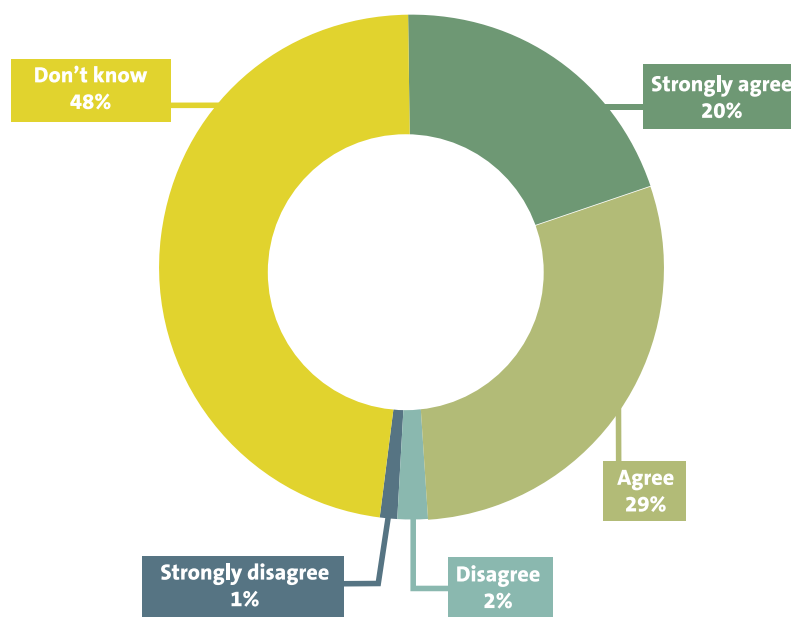
2% agreed that enforcement is prioritised by local authorities;

82% agreed that the horse passport system is not being enforced

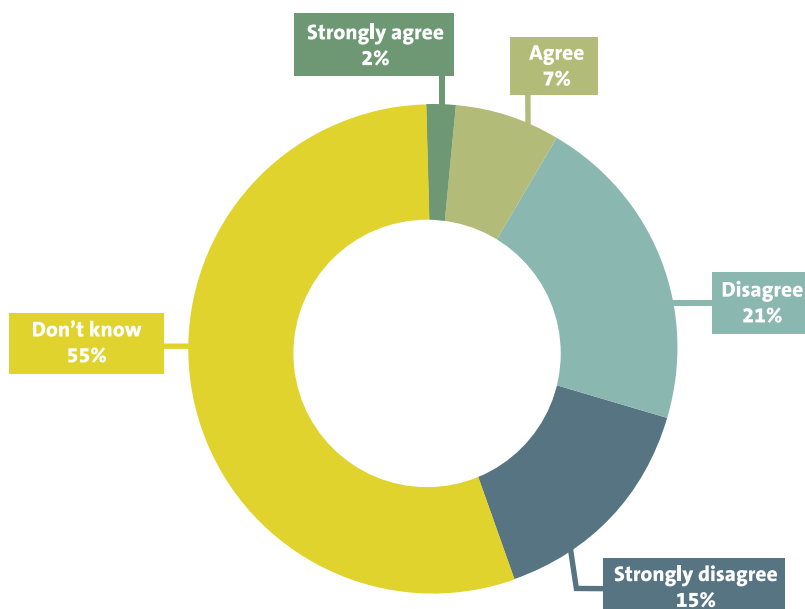
51% agreed that local authorities don't penalise those who are caught

When asked about local authority powers to enforce the equine identification legislation, many respondents said that they didn't know. However, of those that did feel they were informed enough to respond the majority felt that the current powers available to local authority inspectors are not effective or sufficient. This aligns with British Horse Council's position that the current powers do not address the problem, as a non-compliant horse owner can discharge their liability for an offence by paying the fixed penalty notice, yet not be required to obtain a passport and/or microchip their equine. Under current legislation the owner can then not be prosecuted for the same offence, yet the equine is still not identified.

Statement: The current powers available to local authority inspectors are not effective



Statement: Local authorities have sufficient powers to enforce horse passport laws





The majority of comments indicate that **an absence of enforcement results in a loss of confidence in the system and therefore a reduced likelihood of compliance.** There is a good understanding of the reasons why local authorities do not enforce, and in some cases a lack of belief that they ever will. This paves the way for enforcement to be made much easier, with better central data to enable remote checks to be carried out.



The authorities are doing very little to enforce passport laws. No point making laws if not vigorously complied with and enforced.



We still see horses dumped that cannot be identified. In some areas horses repeatedly get out onto roads and Council do not follow through checking ID.



The system is ridiculous. Honest horse owning folk are expected to jump through mad hoops for no good reason while those who don't care to comply face no consequences at all.



I have never heard of any complaints being made or enforcements being carried out. Following all the cuts to local authorities over the past 10-15 years I doubt whether they would have the resources or capacity to prioritise enforcement when they currently lack resources for child protection and adult social care.



69%

agree that those who comply are targeted whilst those who do not comply seem to get away with it



I understand why there are the rules etc, but along with getting a passport, having horses micro-chipped and following all guidelines etc. are not going to affect those that the rules SHOULD be aimed at. The honest and law-abiding horse owners are the ones that pay the extra money and that follow the rules are NOT the ones that are breaking the rules.



Until the passport system is enforced it makes no difference whether they are paper, digital or both.



Improving compliance with equine identification requirements

Respondents were given a number of statements relating to changes to the current equine identification system, and asked what impact, if any, they would have on enforcement. While the intent of the question was to measure 'positive' impact, this was not specifically stated; however, all the text responses had interpreted it in line with this intent.

- 73%** felt improving public awareness of who to report concerns to would have an impact
- 80%** felt that local authority websites clearly directing people to the right person/email address to report concerns would improve enforcement
- 78%** responded that allocating additional resources to local authorities to enforce the horse passport system would have an impact
- 90%** felt that more proactive checks should be carried out to ensure that horses are microchipped and passported, and their details are up to date
- 88%** believe that responding to reported concerns within an appropriate timescale would have an impact

A more complex picture emerges from the text responses, with suggestions that veterinary surgeons, PIOs, markets and equine sector bodies (such as British Eventing, British Dressage etc.) should be playing a role in raising the level of compliance. Respondents suggest that this could be achieved by checking microchips and increasing awareness of legislative requirements and taking appropriate action where needed, such as refusing entry to a competition or sale if the passport information is not up to date or overstamped by a UK PIO. Others also suggested that equine identification legislation should not be enforced until the system works more effectively and efficiently for horse owners.

When asked specific questions about the powers of local authorities, horse owners felt more confident to respond (with fewer responding 'don't know').



My dad works for the local council and has had to deal with some fly grazing horses and the problem always is that without proof it's the same horse then the process has to start all over again so if there was a way to identify the horse it would be better, but he isn't horsey so would need training on say scars and whorl patterns.



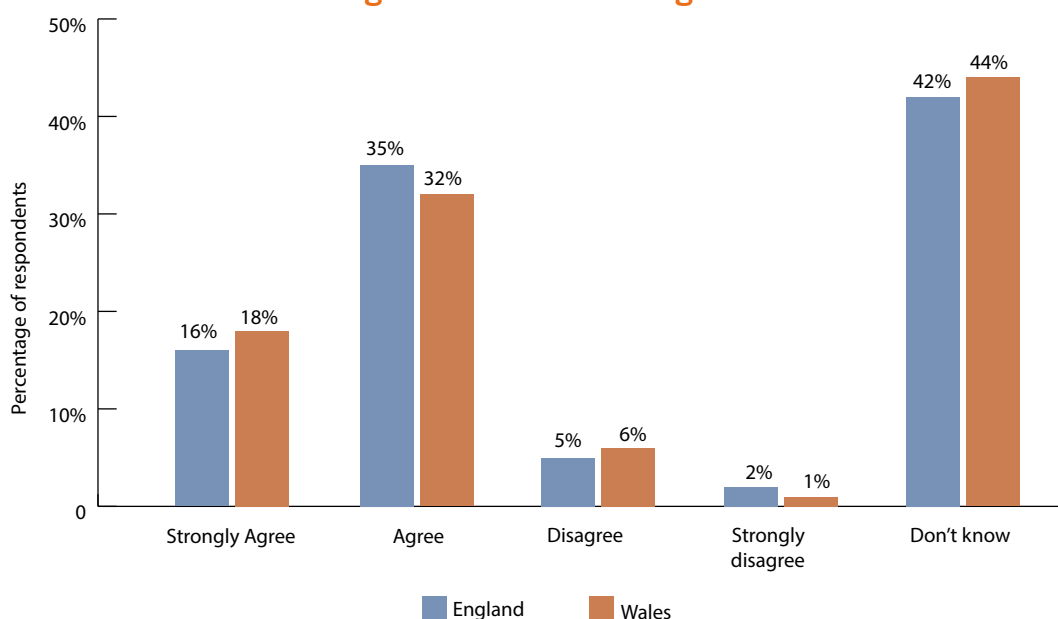
71% felt that giving local authorities the power to microchip and passport a horse, and claim the costs back from the owner, would have an impact; and **79%** said that using fixed penalty notices more frequently and more effectively would have an impact. A number of responses raised valid concerns about local authority inspectors microchipping equines. This was not the intent of this question, and it should be clear that BHC's position is that local authorities should have the power to authorise veterinary surgeons to microchip and passport a horse.



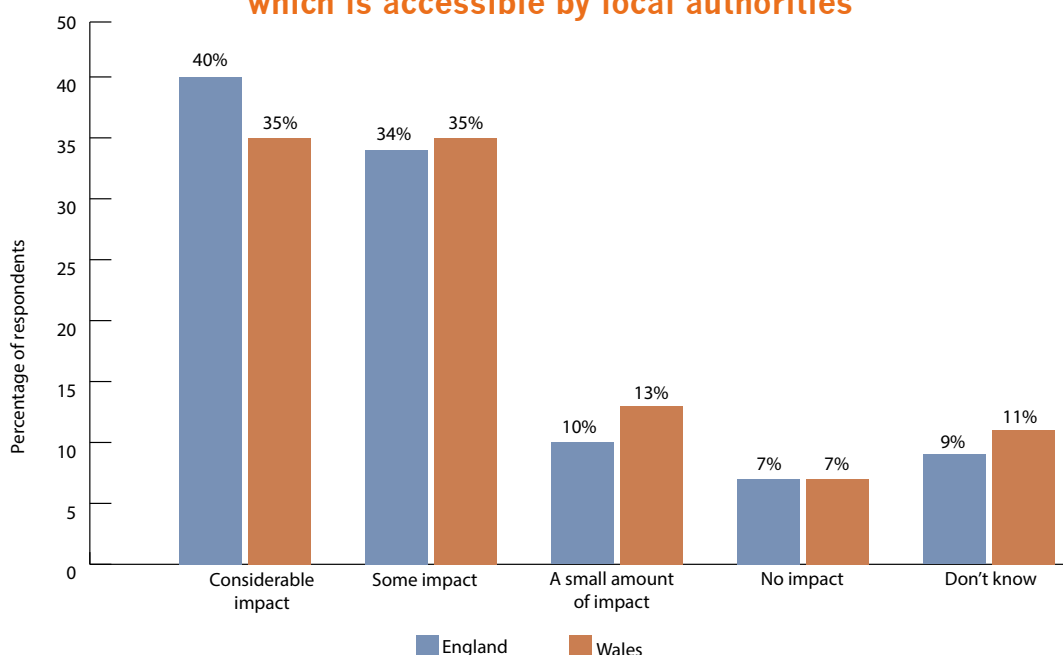
Identification of semi-ferals on derogated areas

England and Wales both have derogated areas, while Scotland has none. The responses below therefore reflect the views of horse owners located in England and Wales only. A good proportion of people responded, “don’t know” to these questions and asked, in the free text boxes, for the definition of a ‘derogated area’. These are areas recognised under law where semi-feral equines are allowed to be kept without being passported or microchipped, however if they are moved off this area they must be fully identified. This applies to many of the Welsh commons and areas in England, such as the New Forest and Dartmoor.

The current law is too difficult and time consuming to enforce on derogated areas



All horses on derogated areas should be identifiable (e.g. by photo) and their details kept on a digital list, which is accessible by local authorities

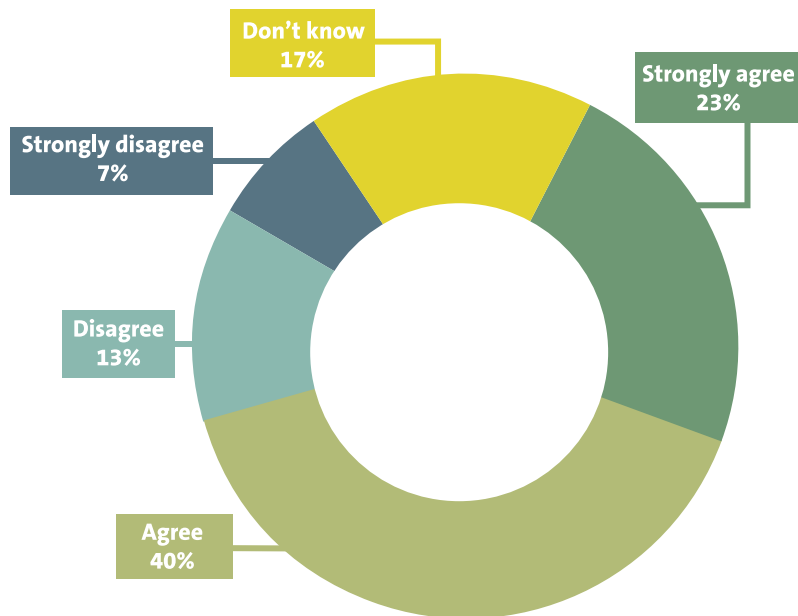




Moving unidentified equines for welfare reasons

A very specific question was asked about horses that are not passported and/or microchipped; under current legislation these animals can only be moved once, if they are seized for welfare reasons under the relevant animal welfare legislation, and this move may be to a veterinary hospital and not to their final destination. Welfare organisations have raised concerns about this current legislative constraint, as many equines that are signed over are not fully identified (and as they are not 'seized' should not be moved under current legislation) but leaving them in situ until this is addressed would have welfare implications.

Unidentified horses that are seized or signed-over should be allowed to move on a temporary identification



Chapter 3

Equine identification and breed societies

Of the 28% of people who responded to statements on studbooks and breeding, **93% said that they agreed that studbooks are important in implementing breeding regulations, and 92% believe any future legislation should continue to allow them to manage pedigree/breeding information.**

The importance of studbooks is evident in the quantitative responses. A number of the free text responses highlighted that breed (zootechnical) information could be linked to ID but managed separately.



Identification and pedigree should be separated. I should be able to submit identification data at birth of a foal free of charge. Then later, if I want to register as a [...] or a [...] or whatever, I should apply to the [...] Society or [...] for entry into the stud book completely separately to the legally required identification.



“ There should be one National agency responsible for ensuring passports and chipping is done and breed societies should submit information to them as part of their responsibility to the breed they represent. ”

“ The current system is flawed because identity and pedigree are confused - they should be separate. Identity should be registered within a week of birth - and should be free. Getting a horse accepted into a particular studbook should be a completely different process. ”

“ I agree with stud books for registering bloodlines but not for issuing passports. ”



Others indicated that the complexity of the current system has meant they have not registered with the breed society.



I find registering a foal quite daunting. I'm never quite sure where to go and have ended up using a generic passport and therefore lose the horse's breeding.

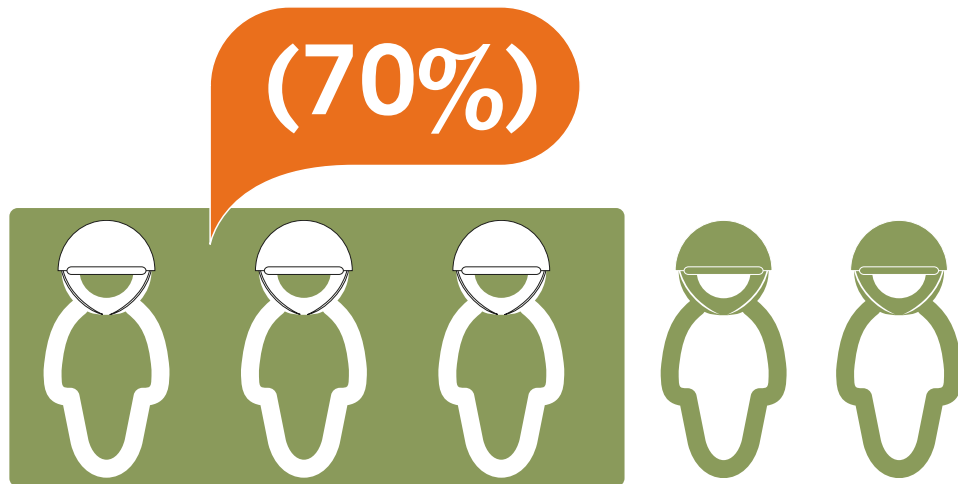


High level thematic analysis of the free text responses in this section indicates that systems operating in the cattle world, where ID of the animal is managed separately to the pedigree information work well and could be transferrable to equine ID. **Respondents positively commented that studbooks' knowledge is longstanding and that they could beneficially focus on genetics, managing inbreeding, managing heritable health conditions and that "this information is not the same equine ID"**.



Chapter 4

Developing the equine identification system



Over 3 out of 5 respondents disagreed that things should be left as they are with a paper passport applied for and updated in the post, and with the current charging structure.

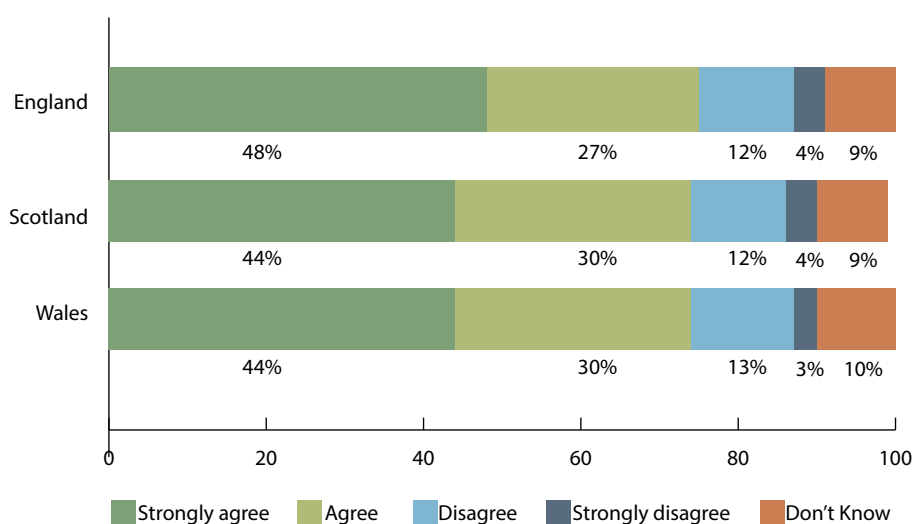


Too many Passport Issuing Organisations

The survey offered a number of statements to assess support for the system remaining as it is now, as well as presenting various options for change (both digital and paper).

While only asked whether there should be fewer PIOs, throughout the survey respondents highlighted that they would like to see **one central body responsible for managing equine identification**.

There should be fewer than 10 Passport Issuing Organisations (PIOs) for the UK



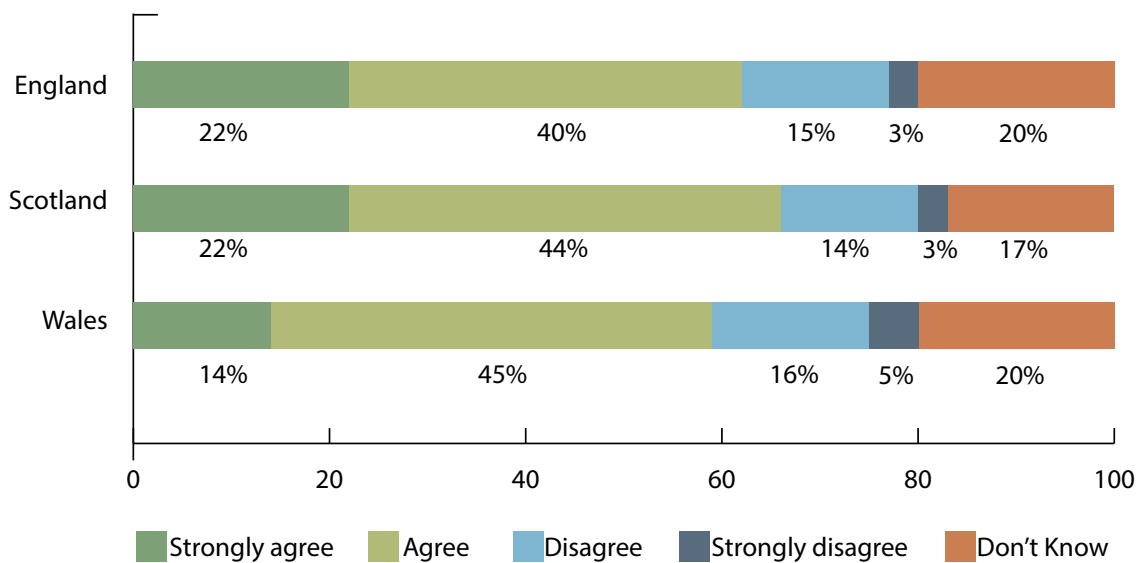
There are too many passport issuing authorities. There should be 1 central government passport body for passports, and then the breed societies should register pedigrees etc. only (like they do for cattle).



There should be a single agency for passports and stringent checks should be made on the selling and buying of equines at sales.



Breed/pedigree information should be managed by studbooks in a paper passport



Should be a single database for all breeds.



Too many societies available to register with and then that becomes more confusing for owners. A lot of owners thought the passport company would put the microchip details onto a central database and didn't realise they were different.



Ability to use photos

92%

of respondents agreed that photos should be used to support the markings diagram to help identify a horse.

Many respondents noted that horse markings and colour can change over time, meaning the silhouette and description often do not match the horse. The ability to upload photos of all sides of a horse as he/she ages, and at different times of the year, was viewed positively — particularly for those breeds with clear distinguishing markings.



Horse markings change over time, I have had foals born with bold black/white markings that have turned totally one colour, that or grey. I am not paying a vet to come out and re-sketch due to cost. Simple photo updates that we can do online would be far easier.



Standardising paper passports

89%

of respondents agreed that paper passports should be standardised so that they all have the same format.

“As a vet there are huge variations in passports which makes it difficult to advise people and find things.”

“I believe we should have one passport system - either paper or digital, but not both - this leaves the door open to more fraudulent documents. I believe very strongly that breed/pedigree information should be managed by the breed studbook, but not necessarily via a paper passport. Paper passports could be phased out over time, but with a strict time limit to change. All passports should be in the same format, but with the additional breed parentage required for breed studbooks.”

“System needs to be simpler, and standardised. Easy to update and keep up to date.”

“Standardisation and consistency is paramount. Compliance with legislation should be made easy and accessible, which the current system most definitely is not. Literacy levels are a genuine barrier to compliance because of the unnecessary complexity of the current system.”

Moving to an online system

While the majority of respondents agreed that digital passports should be available as an alternative to paper passports and information should be managed online, they expressed a clear preference for paper passports remaining as an alternative. A number of the responses referenced the V5C used to identify the person responsible for insuring and taxing a vehicle or the cattle traceability system (which use both paper and digital).



I would like to see Breed information on paper linked to a digital passport. I would also like to see a paper “master” copy of the digital passport as now (V5C) which would reference the breed information if desired. If this is implemented, then why wouldn’t we have a single passport issuing authority with 70 breeding (or even more if foreign breeding studbooks are included) organisations providing links to their own studbooks. We need a single PIO - we also need to recognise that the PIO doesn’t need to include the management of studbooks. So, a competition horse would have a paper passport detailing ownership, vaccination status and reference to studbook paperwork if necessary. It would have a separate studbook document issued by the studbook organisation. And there would be a digital app that is portable to allow the keeper to demonstrate the horse’s status at competitions and / or during enforcement.

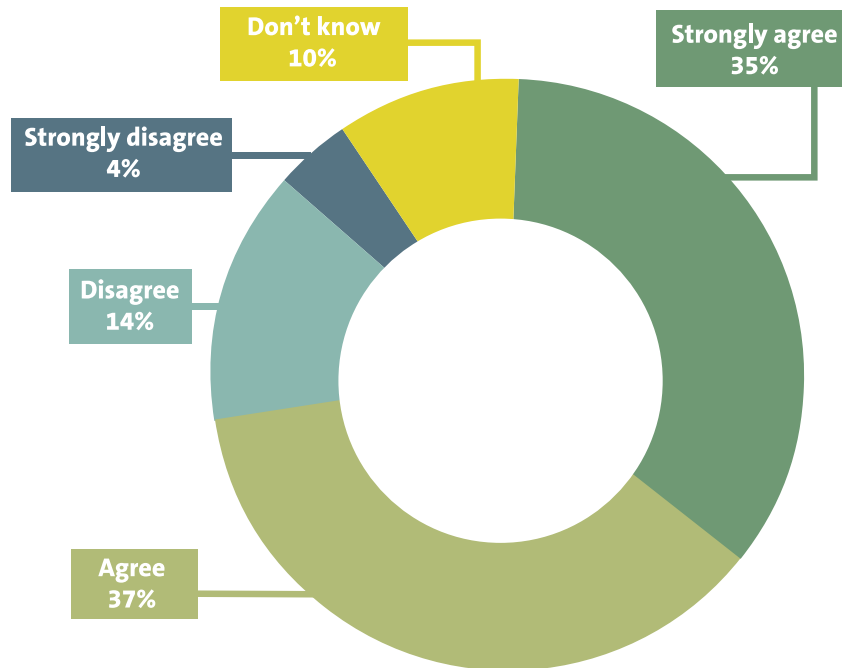


A simple electronic database passport system would be much more effective, can’t forget it when travelling. No more paper, can’t lose it, no cost of courier and insurance on postage.



The survey provides evidence for the **friction caused by a paper-based system**, offering reasons of cost and complexity for not keeping identification documents up to date. There is wide recognition that **digital systems would create a better environment for providing low or no cost updates online or in app.**

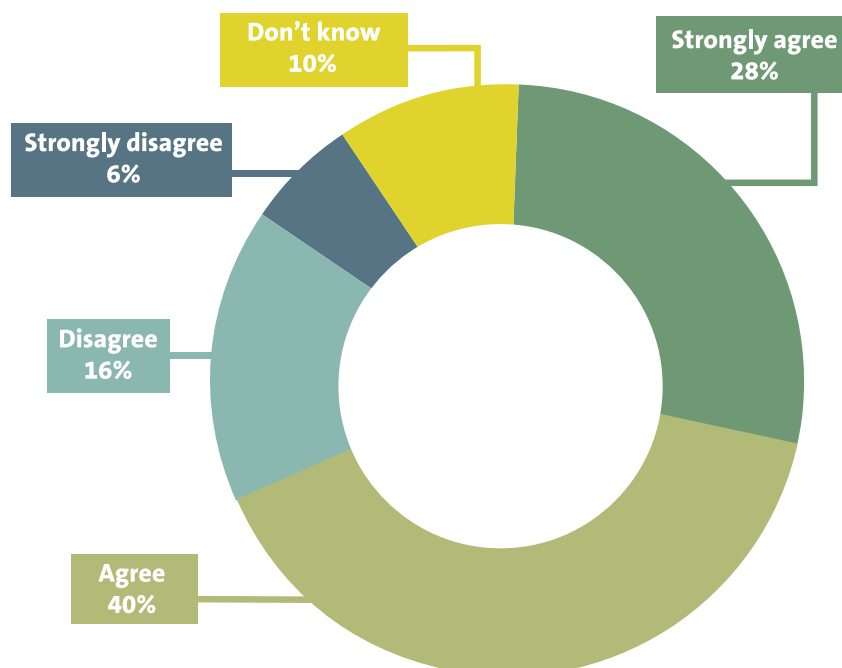
Statement: Horse identity information (e.g. name, colour, date of birth) should be managed in a digital app



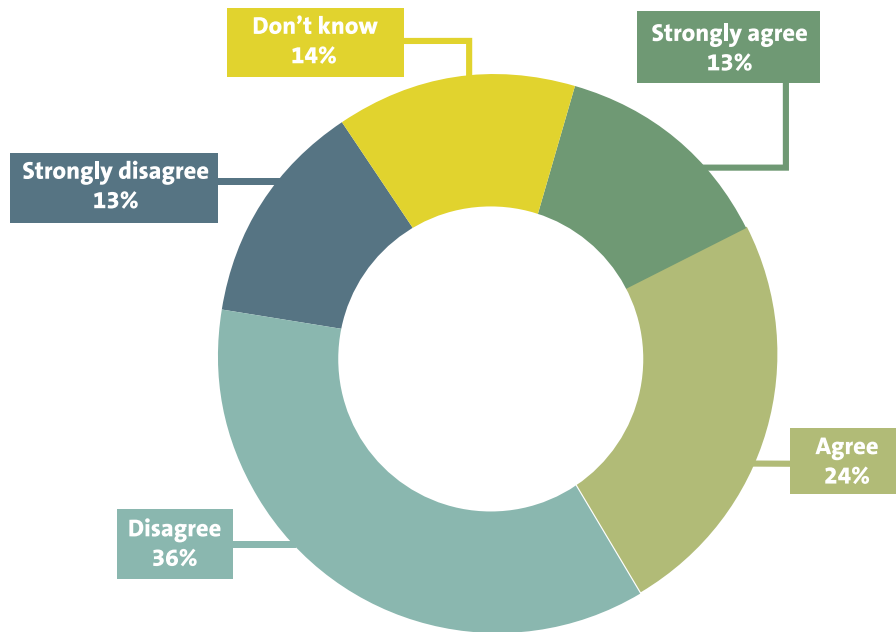
Digital passports and immediate transfer of ownership should be available.



Statement: Digital passports should be available as an alternative to paper passports



Statement: Paper passports should be phased out over time



“ Ways to be able to update your own horses’ passports with contact details, up to date pictures etc would save money & time, also encourage people to keep them updated. ”

“ Yes, I agree that a digital format is a much more up to date and a safer way to passport horses. Everyone has their phone on them when they are at the yard and just a quick click and all of the information is available. ”



Concerns around moving online

The concerns shared by participants moving to completely to digital were around accessibility, tradition, cost, fraud, belief in the vulnerabilities of online systems, dislike of digital applications, and/or sentimentality.



In the area where I live there are a surprising number of people who do not have access to digital technology through their own choice or lack of finances. Also, Wifi speeds are very slow and regularly drop out altogether. Therefore, I think that paper passports should be run alongside digital information. Modern technology needs to be very much improved before we do away with paper passports. Also, every horse owner likes to have that paper passport as a memento of their horse.



I don't have a smart phone and don't want everything on an app. I am okay with it being more online but not if it requires a smart phone.



Only reservation is I presume if passports go digital it will be another excuse to charge owners who already have paper passports more money to change them over. I do not see why every change is charged back to owners who try to do things legally and responsibly.



Digital is the way to go but careful consideration must be given to the security of any digital apps and how the owner/carer is registered.



On the other hand, concerns were also raised about running a dual passport system, whether it is the digital or the paper document that is the “master” and it being potentially open to abuse, particularly when an equine dies.

“ You cannot have two documents available unless carefully controlled. Therefore, thought should be given to this and how it could be managed. Otherwise, thieves charter.”

“ Passport must be returned until such a time when they are phased out, saves a false passport being used for another horse.”



Using a digital app

83% of respondents agreed that the buyer or seller of a horse should be able to notify change of ownership details in a digital app

87% agreed that the owner/carer should be able to apply for and update a horse's record in a digital app at minimal cost

87% agreed that the owner/carer should be able to sign a horse out of the food chain via a digital app

80% agreed that the owner/carer should be able to notify the death of a horse in a digital app without returning the paper passport

In their free text responses, many respondents again raised concerns about digital systems being hacked or being too open to fraud. It is certain that any digital systems would need to reach robust government standard security thresholds, but it is nonetheless important to understand people's concerns.



Anyone could say they are the owner of a horse by using digital ...and not giving proofalso they could sell a horse on if it was not theirs to do by using an app.



They also highlighted that the statement on change of ownership should have said “buyer **and** seller”, not “buyer **or** seller” – requiring verification from both parties.



I think the first statement should say both buyer and seller must notify change of ownership. Dealers must notify that they have had a horse through their hands, but not have to pay for this. Owners need a complete history, when they buy a horse.



Benefits of moving online



Disease notification would prevent spread of non-notifiable diseases such as strangles as some places may try to hide outbreaks. The ability to register medical treatment, vaccinations etc is beneficial as it doesn't require people to remember to get passports signed and written in, as well as potentially being more difficult to falsify as you could have vet accounts requiring proof of qualifications or similar.



The survey asked respondents to consider how beneficial, if at all, a digital app would be when considering several statements.

96% said that it would be a benefit if the owner/carer could flag up if their horse had strayed or been stolen

75% felt it would be beneficial if the owner/carer could register the birth of a horse and apply for a passport later

93% said it would be beneficial if vets could add microchip details to a horse's digital app when they implant or check it

90% responded that vets registering vaccinations in a digital app would be beneficial

88% said it would be beneficial if vets could register medicines and medical treatments in a digital app

95% felt that having disease notifications for your local area sent in the event of an outbreak would be beneficial



Respondents highlighted the need for better traceability of equines for disease notifications to be effective.





Disease notifications would be excellent, but the list of notifiable diseases needs reviewing and adding to, especially strangles. However, the postcode of the horse's residence would need to be recorded and used for disease notifications. No point notifying on the owner's location as that could be miles away.





The majority of those who responded were in favour of registering medicines in a digital app, with respondents highlighting that they believed that this would give greater protection to those seeking to purchase an equine.

 *I think that vets should have to record all medical treatments for a horse into some sort of database by law. So doing it on a passport app could be beneficial. This would make it almost impossible for unscrupulous sellers to pass on a horse wrongly advertised.* 

 *All equine clinical history was accessible on this app would be so helpful to prospective buyers and would make it extremely difficult for dodgy dealers selling on horses dishonestly - I am a victim of a dodgy dealer/breeder in less than the first 24 hours of ownership I was badly injured which took me 2 years to walk again. Currently going to court and it is apparent they were aware as we have managed to get access to part of the horse medical past. Not all. Transparency is so important please help stop what happened to me happening to anyone else. I am lucky to be alive.* 

However, others were concerned about the additional work this would require for vets, and the potential cost implications.

 *Not sure how the vets will feel about all the extra hassle of updating on an app. It would need to be very user friendly.* 

 *Too much extra work for vets.* 

“

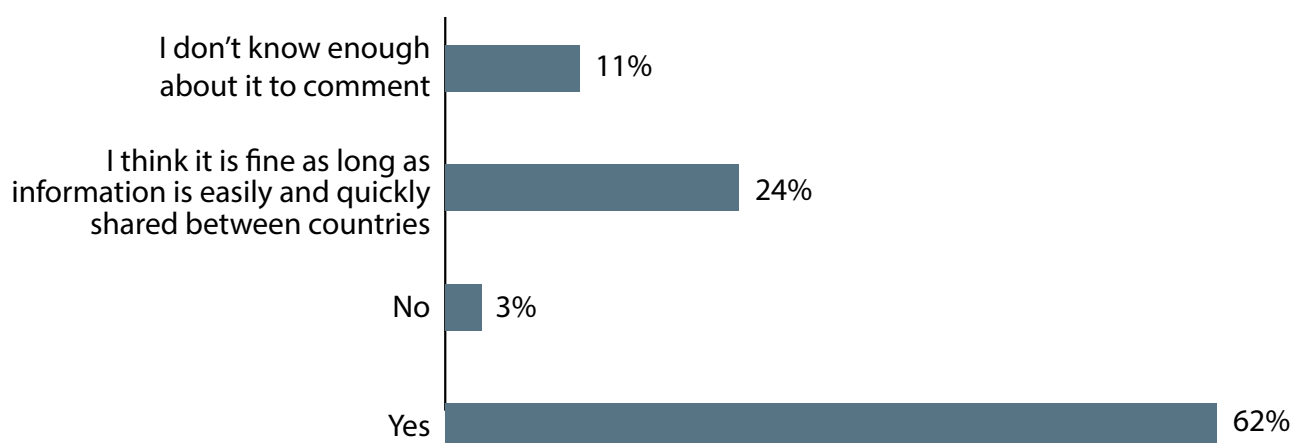
I think there needs to be one issuing passport agency. No costs for updating address or ownership or death of horse as people don't bother then to do it. Vets should request to see the passport to treat a horse and check ownership, also all vaccines, medications and veterinary treatment should be entered in a section in the passport that also shows a photograph of the horse alongside markings etc to make identification easier if a horse is travelled, sold etc. My mare came with two passports from different agencies, I didn't know which one to use. I have updated my owner details and address and when a horse has died but I have never been asked to show any of their passports, ever. I asked the vet to update them so they could not be sold for slaughter in case something happened to me. Also the cost of updating the passports puts most people off. Hardly any of the owners my horses have had or dealers updated ownership, it was only through tracking previous owners or breeders for veterinary history that I discovered how many times the passports for my horses had never been updated and how many owners they had had. Vets, dealers, sales etc should all be made to check the passports...

”

Chapter 5

Moving forward together

Question: Do you think having different legal requirements for horse passports across UK countries would be complex to deal with?



For those that responded yes, when asked to explain their response:

- 66%** said owners/carers and their horses don't always live in the same country
- 81%** said that it was because horses travel across countries for competition and recreation all the time
- 86%** felt that creating different horse passport systems in each country seems confusing
- 83%** agreed that it could be difficult if the Passport Issuing Organisation is governed by different laws to where the horse and/or the owner/carer are located

Respondents expressed a **strong preference for simplicity** – to avoid confusion – and also raised concerns about compliance and enforcement if laws are different between the UK countries, as horses do move between them frequently.



“

Would make it difficult to enforce, you may inadvertently be breaking the law in the country you're visiting but be legal in country of origin.

”

“

I live right on the Welsh/ English border, Covid regulations proved that it was very confusing for local people with different rules for each country. Need UK wide rules.

”

“

One authority, one set of rules, one main database. Keep it as straightforward and as simple as possible.

”

Chapter 6

Benefits of an effective equine identification system

Respondents were given a number of statements and asked to how an effective identification system would help. While this could be paper or digital, some chose to interpret as meaning an online system (potentially skewing some of the responses, depending on whether they were, or were not, supportive of digital solutions).

90% said it would be beneficial in enabling disease outbreaks to be more easily contained


96% felt that a benefit would be allowing horses to be more easily reunited with their owner if they have strayed or been stolen


96% thought that a benefit would be enabling horses to be more easily traced if they go missing

91% said it would be beneficial to ensure that irresponsible horse owners and/or keepers could be held to account more easily

86% felt it would be beneficial if the horse's passport could be recognised as evidence of proof of ownership

Many respondents commented on whether a horse's passport should be recognised as proof of ownership, with strongly conflicting views. A key concern was that as the passport must remain with the equine, it would enable keepers to sell on an animal. Conflictingly, others highlighted the opposite, that it would allow owners to prove ownership if an animal was mis-sold or stolen (if the details are up to date). Any digital solutions would have to address these concerns.

 *Horse passport being evidence of ownership would need to be carefully done if it is handed over to keepers or loaners, especially if they are able to change it by sending it off. This could cause more issues than it resolves.*

 *It would be helpful for those people who put their horse out on loan to be able to prove ownership and to be able to check on their horse's vaccination status and any health issues that may occur instead of having to rely on what they are told by the person who has the horse on loan.*

Chapter 7

Opportunities for change

This report highlights that the current equine identification system simply is not working for horse owners.

The complexity of the requirements means that information is not up to date on the central database. What emerges as critical is that the creation of a simple and accessible equine identification system, with clear benefits communicated, and palpably evident, is legislated for.

An effective equine identification system would allow horse owners and keepers to better manage their horse's information at a proportionate cost, enabling them to be notified of any disease threats in their area and easily flag if their horse is missing and stolen to a database that is accessible to relevant enforcement agencies. It would give greater protection to those seeking to purchase a horse and those who have horses out on loan – making it more challenging to sell an equine without a passport or the details not being up to date.

We know that many challenges exist when it comes to equine identification, but so do many opportunities. The British Horse Council has found enough support from respondents to this survey to recommend a secure online digital first solution, recognised under law, that would allow:

- **Horse owners across Great Britain, and ideally UK, to register and update their and their horse's details using the CED, at low or no cost**
- **That equine identification information be linked to studbook databases so that the studbooks can obtain up to date information centrally and link it to pedigree information held by them, in a robust two-tier system**
- **Ability to record that a horse is on loan or missing, with owner and loaner (operators) having access to the horse's record and ability to update it, time and date stamped, from their own verified user profiles**
- **Veterinary surgeons to enter and/or verify vaccination records**
- **A secure digital handshake between the buyer and seller of a horse**
- **Event organisers to have the facility available to pre-certify the vaccination status of an equine when it is entered into a competition**
- **Photos to be uploaded and used alongside silhouettes.**

For more information:

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