



## Saddlery Fitter perspectives on equine welfare: survey report

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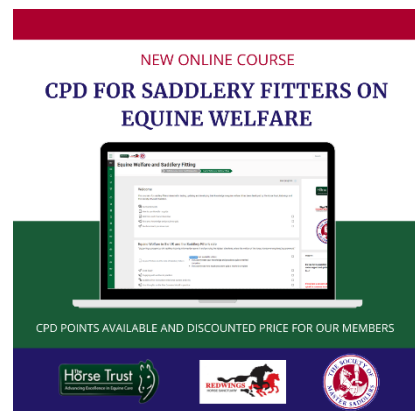
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## 1. Introduction

This survey was created by Redwings in collaboration with the Society of Master Saddlers (SMS) and The Horse Trust to seek an understanding of the perspectives of saddlery fitters on equine welfare issues. The findings provided insights for the training for Saddlery Fitters on equine welfare which is available to both members and non-members of the SMS online (<https://horsetrust.org.uk/training-courses/saddlery-fitters/>). Members of the SMS who complete the course earn 8 credits towards their annual requirement for Continued Professional Development.



## 2. Methodology

The survey was developed in November 2019 and is formed of 13 questions, including both open and closed questions. It was piloted in December with members of the SMS and The Horse Trust before finalising. The survey ran between 22<sup>nd</sup> December and 6<sup>th</sup> January 2021. The sample was self-selecting, with respondents opting in to take the survey from promotional invitations circulated to the mailing list of SMS members (n=c.200). 57 responses were recorded, 43 of which (75.4%) were completed surveys.

This report includes the survey responses analysed in the online survey tool Alchemer that was used to create the survey and collect responses. Data was then analysed using quantitative and qualitative methodology.

For more information about the survey or the training please contact [education@redwings.co.uk](mailto:education@redwings.co.uk).

### 3. Findings

**Question 2: Which do you think are the MAIN welfare issues faced by equine welfare organisations in the UK? (select up to 5)**

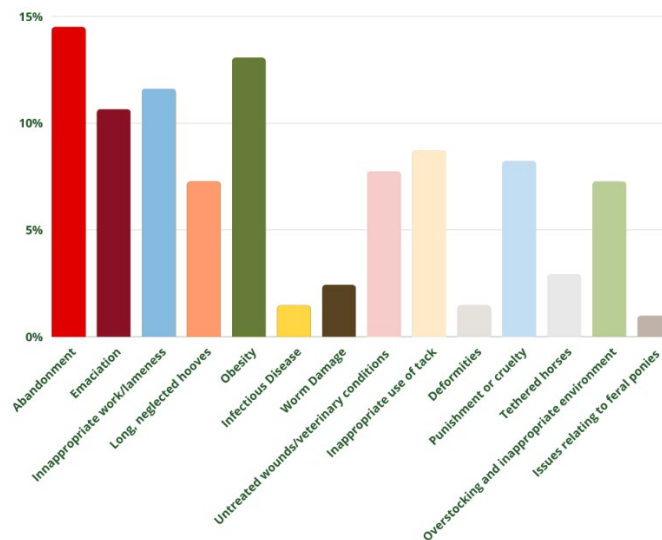


Figure 1 Data displayed in a bar graph demonstrating what the sample believed to be the main welfare issues faced by equine welfare organisations in the UK.

The most common response was 'abandonment' (14.49%) followed by 'obesity' (13.04%) then 'inappropriate work/lameness' (11.59%). The least common response was 'issues relating to feral ponies' (0.97%). Four respondents wrote in other responses which were 'horses/ponies kept alone' (n=2), 'lack of knowledge', and 'neglect, incorrect work/training'.

The findings of questions two and three suggest that the welfare problems that saddlers encounter during their work influence their view of which welfare issues are the main issues faced by welfare organisations. Weight, lameness and tack issues were in the top five issues seen by saddlers, and the top welfare issues faced by equine welfare organisations according to saddlers.

**Question 3. What are the most common welfare problems that you have come across in your work with clients?**

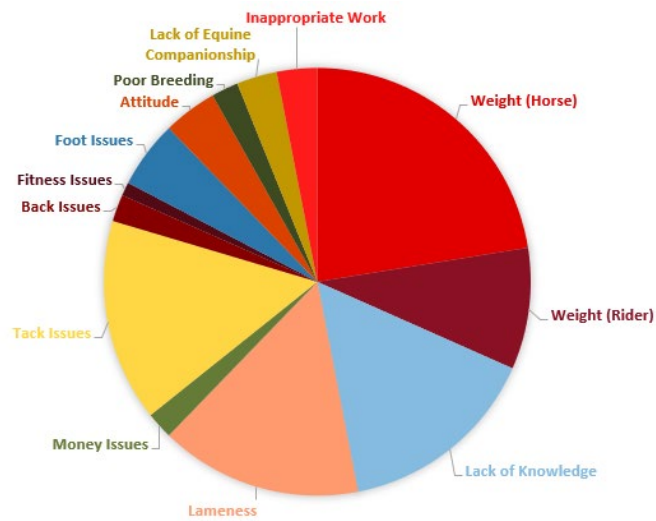


Figure 2 A pie chart displaying the results of qualitative analysis groupings of responses. Two respondents gave no comment so are not included in the analysis.

The most reported welfare issue was the weight of horses (22.45%), both underweight and overweight, followed by owners lacking knowledge (15.31%), lameness (15.31%) and tack issues (15.31%).

A total of 43 responses were recorded, two of which were removed from analysis due to having no comment. The 41 remaining responses were placed into categories depending on their content, with most responses having multiple categories within them. To see the breakdown of the categories and the quotes attributed to them, please see Appendix 1.

**Question 4. How likely would you be to contact a welfare organisation if you were concerned about a horse?**

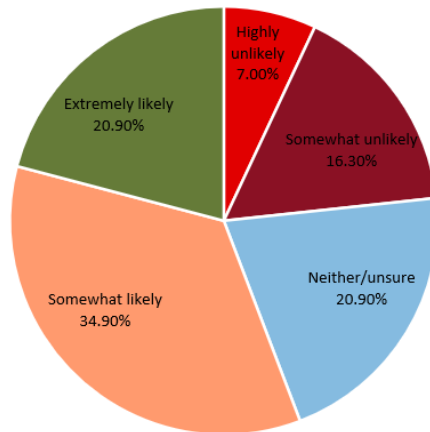


Figure 3 A pie chart displaying the likelihood of the sample (n=43) to contact a welfare organisation.

The most common response was 'somewhat likely', and over half of the respondents were more likely to contact a welfare organisation than not.

**Question 5. Which, if any, of the following would prevent you from contacting a welfare organisation about a client's horse? (use the comment box to give us more explanation to your response)**

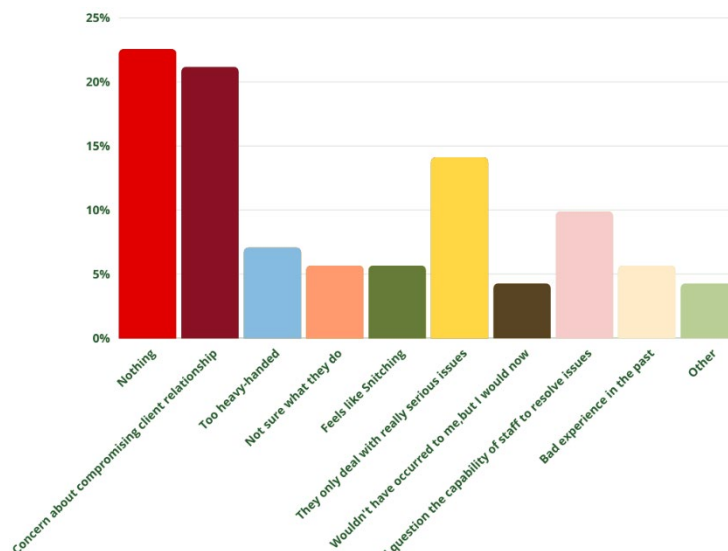


Figure 4 A bar graph displaying the factors that would prevent the respondents from contacting welfare organisations.

The highest number of respondents indicated that nothing would prevent them contacting a welfare organisation (38.1%), but this is not the majority. The most indicated concern is the possibility of compromising the client relationship (35.7%), followed by the assumption that welfare organisations only deal with really serious issues (23.8%). Three respondents chose 'other' as their response, but only two respondents provided other answers which were 'would try to address with owner first', and 'feel like they have more serious/bigger issues to deal with'.

**Question 6. Which, if any, of the following would prevent you from contacting a welfare organisation about a client's horse? (use the comment box to give us more explanation to your response) - comments**

In addition to question five, respondents were invited to add additional comments to elaborate on reasons why they may not contact a welfare organisation about a client's horse. A strong theme in these responses was that saddlers feel comfortable providing advice themselves, and that most issues they see are due to a lack of knowledge rather than intentional neglect. One respondent wrote 'luckily people who care enough to call a fitter hopefully don't put their horse in a welfare state', so they would approach the client themselves rather than contact a welfare organisation. Many respondents believed that education of the owner is the most suited action, and likely to have the best outcome.

Another theme is the belief that welfare organisations do not deal with individual cases of mild neglect, or that welfare organisations are so busy it would be inconvenient to the organisation to be contacted. One respondent wrote 'I would have assumed their resources are better allocated to larger scale neglect cases'.

To read all the comments made by respondents, please refer to appendix 2.

**Question 7. What is the main piece of legislation used to support animal welfare in England and Wales?**

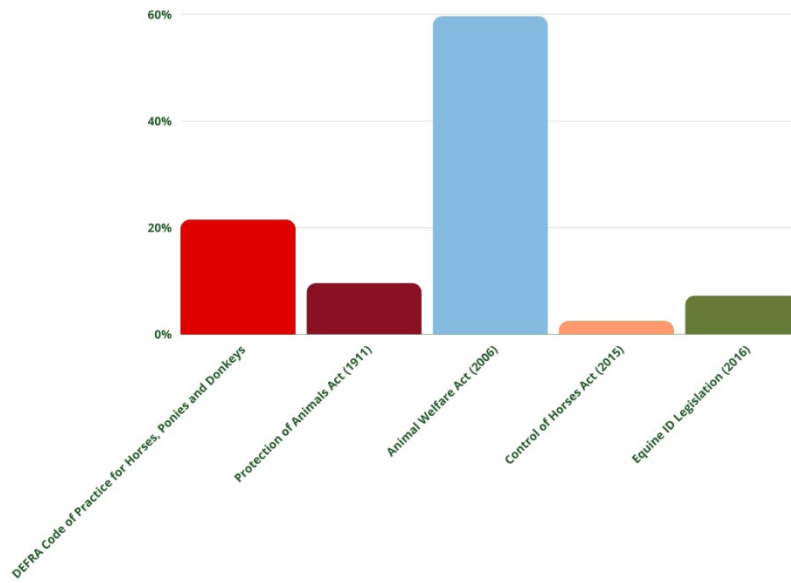


Figure 5 A bar graph displaying the responses to question seven. Most respondents selected the 'Animal Welfare Act (2006)' (59.52%).

**Question 8. What experience do you have working with equine welfare charities?**

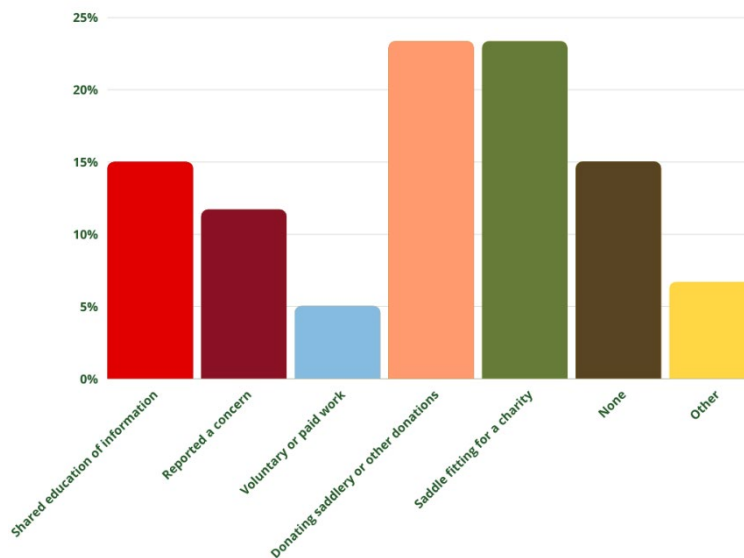


Figure 6 A bar graph displaying the data from the responses to question eight.

The most common interaction between respondents and equine charities was through giving donations or doing a saddle fitting for a charity. 11.67% of respondents had reported a concern. Four respondents chose 'other', and three wrote additional answers, these are 'been a member of various UK charities', 'loaned a pony from a charity', 'worked for WHW for 12 years'.



**Question 9. Do you know which of the following options were identified as key equine welfare issues in a recent study in the UK? You can select multiple options.**

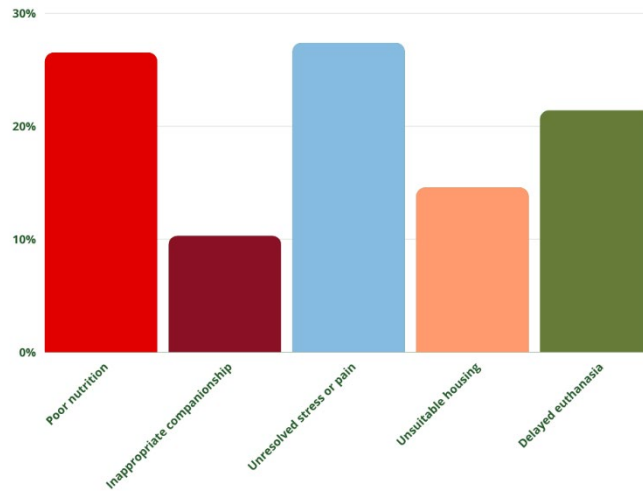


Figure 7 A bar graph displaying the data from the responses to question 9.

The respondents indicated that they thought ‘unresolved stress or pain’ (27.35%) was a key equine welfare issue in a recent study, with ‘poor nutrition’ as a very close second (26.5%).

**Question 10. Which of the following welfare issues do you feel most comfortable talking to clients about?**

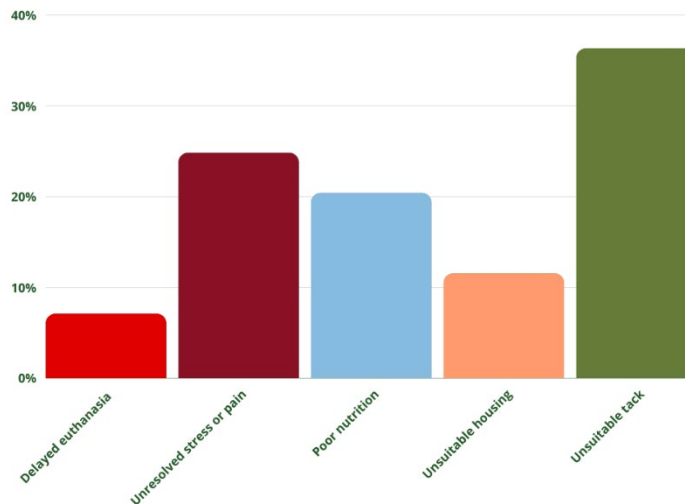


Figure 8 A bar graph displaying the data from the responses to question 10.

The respondents indicated that they were most comfortable discussing ‘unsuitable tack’ with clients (36.28%), and least comfortable discussing ‘delayed euthanasia’ (7.08%).



**Question 11. Which of the following welfare issues do you feel most comfortable talking to clients about? – comments**

The respondents were invited to provide additional comments to question 10. The responses varied between being comfortable discussing all topics ('I would talk to my clients about any of these'), to only discussing saddlery issues ('as a saddle fitter and instructor clearly I am best placed to discuss tack'). A few respondents stated that nutrition and unresolved pain were more accessible topics for them to speak with clients about, with one respondent mentioning that while they feel comfortable discussing overweight equines, they find it very difficult to discuss obesity in the clients themselves. One respondent also noted that they had discussed euthanasia with a client before, but that 'it's better for the vet to have that final conversation'.

To read all the comments made by respondents, please refer to appendix 3.

**Question 12. True or false: client confidentiality would prevent me reporting cruelty or neglect?**



Figure 9 A pie chart displaying the responses to question 12.

The majority of respondents did not think client confidentiality would prevent them from reporting cruelty or neglect (85.4%).

**Question 13. Which of the following organisations are you aware of as a point of contact for help with a struggling owner?**

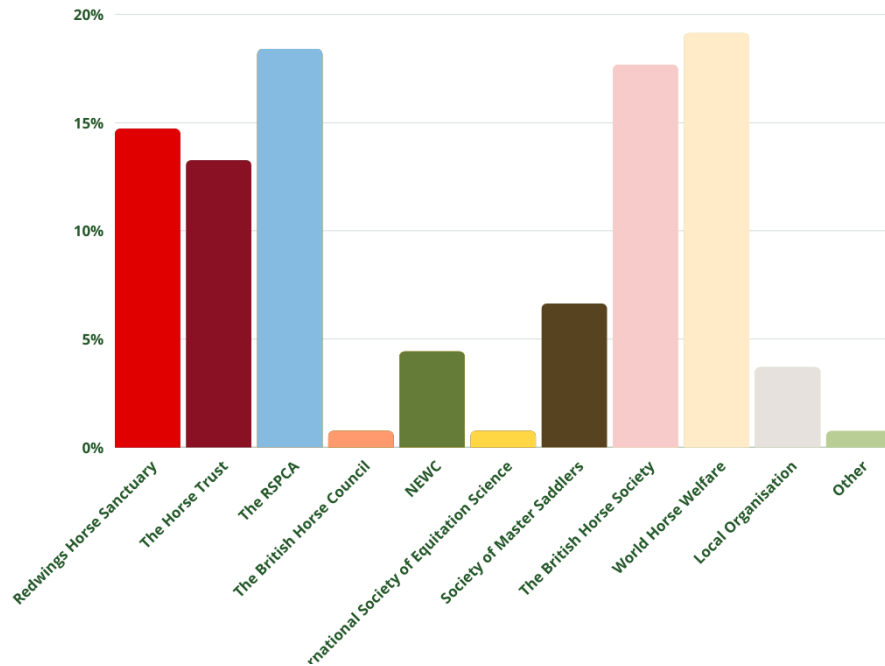


Figure 10 A bar graph displaying the responses to question 13.

Respondents were most aware of 'World Horse Welfare' (19.12%), 'The RSPCA' (18.38%), 'The British Horse Society' (17.65%), 'Redwings Horse Society' (14.71%), and 'The Horse Trust' (13.24%). Four respondents wrote in, their responses were; 'Bransby horses lincoln', 'GSPCA (Guernsey)', 'USPCA', and 'happa'.

## Appendix

### Appendix 1

Categories extracted from responses to question 3 and quotes to support those categories inclusion in analysis.

#### Weight (Horse)

“Obesity Emaciation” – 41

“Overweight horses” – 55

“Overweight/underworked horses” – 64

#### Weight (Rider)

“Riders too heavy for the horse or pony” – 71

“over weight riders” – 59

“and a very difficult subject – overweight riders” – 48

#### Lack of Knowledge

“Lack of owner knowledge” – 25

“people not knowing how to properly care for their animals” – 33

“severe owner ignorance” – 44

#### Lameness

“lame horse” – 22

“Lack of recognition of lameness” – 42

“Undiagnosed/unnoticed lameness” – 50

#### Money Issues

“lack of knowledge and funds to look after horses basic requirements” – 45

“reluctant to consult a vet due to cost implications” – 25

#### Tack Issues

“saddles that has been left too long before being checked causing very sore backs” – 60

“Poorly fitted tack” – 53

“tack used incorrectly” – 64

#### Back Issues

“back issues” – 32

“Lack of back muscle” – 35

#### Fitness Issues

“horses not fit enough for work required” – 36

#### Foot Issues

“bad shoeing” – 37

“foot imbalance” – 36

“neglected hooves” – 57

#### Attitude

“thoughtless riding” – 53

“bad riding (pulling, kicking, hitting the horse)” – 49

(no) interest to correct the problem, even given a low cost solution, would rather spend money on latest equestrian fashion must have” – 45

#### Poor Breeding

“poor breeding (conformation faults)” – 48

“Asymmetry” – 50

#### Lack of Equine Companionship

“Isolated horses (no companion)” – 61

“Solitary horses” – 69

#### Inappropriate Work

“inappropriate discipline methods... inappropriate work/training for age/fitness/soundness” – 69

“inappropriate work” – 68



## Appendix 2

- Depends, less knowledgeable people seem happy for help & advice. I might approach it with the client first. Luckily people who care enough to call a fitter hopefully don't put their horse in a welfare state & if they have it's because they need help.
- I would be more likely to give words of advice and refer the owner to contact a vet.
- Many vets don't recognise pain-related behaviour / gait abnormalities in the ridden horse so I'm not sure contacting a welfare organisation in an individual case would resolve the problem when education of owners generally would be the best way forward.
- I have found the rescue organisations have said they can't do anything in the situations I have addressed with them in the past.
- I would imagine that staff are too overstretched to see every single case of minor neglect, therefore I would have assumed their resources are better allocated to larger scale neglect cases. I have also known welfare charities being contacted in relation to poor welfare and either not helping the situation or having their hands tied in how involved they can get (this was many years ago and is not a main reason why I wouldn't contact a welfare charity).
- Most times it just ignorance, and lack of empathy. It's only happened twice walked away in disgust in 35 years over 3000 fits
- I am more than happy to advise clients about diet and care of their horse if I feel it's appropriate as generally the less experienced clients are the ones that need a bit of guidance and support. I don't believe that I would come across a case that would be so bad to need to be referred as I very much doubt the owner would be paying for a saddle fitting. However, if I was very concerned I would contact an organisation.
- It is too easy to own a horse and most people don't have adequate horse care knowledge to supply even the basic needs for a horse. Some need help or advice on how best to manage their horses but they need support, not to have their animals taken away. My concern would be that the horse could be removed. In any case, if the client realised it was me that had reported them, it would damage my relationship with them and my business would suffer.



### Appendix 3

- If I was knowledgeable I would say something or would advise to speak to someone who knows.
- I have had conversations regarding euthanasia, but it's a very emotive subject, and feel it's better for the vet to have that final conversation.
- I am very direct and open with my clients and would discuss all of the above with them.
- I regularly have discussions with customers about welfare, this is made more difficult when you are suggesting they may need to look at their approach to a certain area of care. The hardest area to tackle is weight, this is unfortunately a regular issue both rider and horses being overweight. It is easier suggesting diet and exercise changing to improve the horse's weight but much harder discussing rider weight and the changes needed for welfare purposes.
- Poor nutrition and unresolved pain or stress often go hand in hand with poor fitting saddlery
- Anything which is affecting the horse in a bad way.
- As a saddle fitter and instructor clearly I am best placed to discuss tack. I will mention other aspects if necessary.
- Clearly as a saddle fitter and instructor I'm best placed to talk about tack, however will talk about other issues if necessary
- I would talk to my clients about any of these

