

The organisation for grooms of all disciplines

It is the only association of its kind in the world, and it aims to bring together those who work in this sector of the equine industry and give all members a sense of belonging.

Many spectators to large equestrian events are not exposed to the work that goes on behind the scenes. The shows attract national and international equestrian stars to compete and it is important to remember that behind each rider is a dedicated support network of grooms, trainers, owners and sponsors.

The significance of a good groom often gets left unnoticed. The importance of the bond between horse, rider and groom and the effect on performance is largely underestimated. Tension, miscommunication and unprofessionalism within the team will undoubtedly show when put under pressure and can make the difference between winning and losing. A good groom will always be two steps ahead, calm, efficient and dedicated to their job. A good employer will be fair, respectful, appreciative and have a good level of communication.

For years grooms have taken a back seat and their hard work often gets left unnoticed by owners, riders and the industry. The British Grooms Association (BGA) is the worlds only grooms association and was founded in May 2007 by Lucy Katan to give grooms a united voice and the support and industry recognition they deserve.

"The BGA strongly believes that grooms are the backbone of the equestrian industry and should be treated as industry professionals" explains Lucy whose inspiration in founding the BGA came following a bad experience at work,



"I really enjoyed my job and loved being part of the British Team, however unfortunately there was one particularly nasty employment situation where I was badly bullied at work. This brought to my attention that there was an obvious gap in our equestrian industry" explains Lucy.

Years of hard work, drive and vision followed and after a successful Grant Application to UnLtd (the Foundation of Social Entrepreneurs) Lucy launched the BGA at Badminton in May 2007.

The BGA offers numerous membership benefits – but more importantly provides a

voice, support and guidance for grooms working in all disciplines. Among its services is a free legal helpline courtesy of Morrish Solicitors LLP, something which has proved invaluable for many grooms.

Alongside this the BGA is continually offering direct support to grooms about a number of topics, including employment issues. Holidays, time off and sick pay are a number of topics that arise on a regular basis. The BGA is also committed to working with and supporting employers and among its services offers a free to download Contract of Employment and advice on grievances procedures and holiday entitlement.

The BGA is also very focused on helping the employer and is set to soon launch the 'Equine Employer's Handbook'. Lucy explained, "The BGA has always been dedicated to improving the industry by working with both employer and employee. We are regularly contacted by employers who need advice and the development of this comprehensive handbook will prove to be an invaluable tool for all equestrian businesses."

From an employers perspective employing a groom can be a 'grey area' so it is important to seek professional advice to ensure that this

is being done correctly. The BGA website offers help and support for employers wishing to know more.

Another step the BGA has taken is to launch the Equine Skills CV, a record of achievement to show what skills a groom has, "I passionately believe that the job as a groom is one of great skill and knowledge. Any good groom will be a perfectionist, have sky high attention to detail, be hard working, possess unique stamina and be dedicated to the horses in their care" says Lucy.

The Equine Skills CV is not a qualification, but a record of achievement which allows grooms to receive recognition for skills and also gives the employer a better understanding of the level they are working to. It is important that the employer knows the skills the employee has to offer and what they can bring to the team.

Previously employment in the equestrian industry has been 'dated' and it is time that grooms were recognised and treated as the professionals they are. A happy respected groom will give 100%, while a badly employed unhappy groom will usually be looking for another job! "It is so important that the industry begins to listen to grooms and hear their views, the BGA provides the opportunity for grooms to speak up with an educated voice" says Lucy.

There are two membership options available, the Standard Membership which is only £17.50, or the Premier Membership for just £59.50 per year which also includes SEIB Personal Accident Cover, "This new band of membership has been created to tackle the worrying amount of grooms who work without any insurance, hence putting their livelihoods at risk. If they are self employed and get injured they will get no money at all" explains Lucy.

The BGA recommends all grooms take out personal accident insurance in case they are unable to work.

For more information on employing your staff and to join call 0845 331 6039 or visit

www.britishgrooms.org.uk