

The British Grooms Association (BGA) offers advice for potential employers



So you're looking for a groom?

A good selection process can result in a more motivated workforce

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good groom is worth their weight in gold, so having a solid recruitment process is essential.

It's important to know exactly what you want the groom to do before you start to recruit. The job title and description will not only help when you advertise but will also be important in the future, should you wish to alter the role.

Be aware of the employment status of those who work for you. It's not uncommon for employers to tell staff they're self-employed when in actual fact they're employees. This is illegal and will be expensive if brought to an employment tribunal.

Next, you need to think about the package you're offering. Self-employed grooms usually charge a set hourly rate and also work for other people. When employing someone there are many other issues to consider. What are the working hours? Will you provide accommodation, use of a car, livery and/or training? All this should be set out in the terms of employment.

A good recruitment and selection process can result in a more effective and motivated workforce — get it wrong and you'll find yourself spending time looking for more staff, which is disruptive to everyone and more importantly to your business.

Ensure your advertisement clearly describes the role, tells candidates how to apply and sets an end date for applications. And remember that when advertising and recruiting, you must be careful not to discriminate.

Word of mouth can work but might not target the wider network of grooms. Adverts in magazines are popular, as are reputable recruitment agencies, which match employers and employees.

Once your advert has closed:

- compare the applications against a job description and specification outlining the skills and experience you need.
- eliminate applicants without the basic requirements for the job.
- notify those you won't be interviewing.
- phone the most suitable candidates and invite



Employers such as Ben Maher prefer to train grooms to do things their way

them for an interview, following up with a letter or e-mail to confirm the arrangements in writing.

The interview is the chance for you to meet the potential employee and assess whether they're suitable for the role and will fit into your yard. Prepare your questions in advance. Your aim is to get quality information so you can assess the person fairly and fully.

"When interviewing, I don't necessarily look for the person with the most qualifications. My best grooms have had good personalities and been hard workers and I prefer to train them in the way we like to do things," says Britain's number one show jumper, Ben Maher.

It's a legal requirement to pay at least the national minimum wage, which for workers aged over 22 is currently £5.80 per hour. Benefits such as accommodation can be deducted from this, but must be set out in the statement of terms.

By law, the employer must provide a written "Statement of the Main Terms and Conditions of Employment", (often referred to as an employment contract) within two months of the beginning of employment.

A verbal agreement isn't legal and the employer could be liable for up to four weeks' pay because of the default. The BGA has a standard statement of terms that can be downloaded free from www.britishgrooms.org.uk >employers.

The Equine Employers Handbook costs £37.50 and will give you more information on all aspects of taking on staff. Get your copy by phoning 0845 331 6039 or visit www.britishgrooms.org.uk

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Wages breakdown

Henry worked a 54-hour six-day week from 7.30am–5.30pm, with an hour's lunch-break. He was paid £5.80 per hour, giving a gross wage of £313.20 per week. Living accommodation was provided and Henry's employer deducted the weekly accommodation allowance of £31.57. His employer also promised in writing to provide three training sessions a week at the value of £20 each, so Henry agreed a deduction from his wage of £60 per week. In addition, Henry kept his horse at the yard and agreed in writing that his employer could deduct £55 weekly from his wage for the keep of his horse.