

Editorial Board

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The export conundrum

There have already been plenty of challenges in 2021 so far, and the exportation of horses and other goods out of the UK and into the European Union (EU) has been the source of many of them for veterinary surgeons involved, often performing dual roles as private advisors to their clients and as Official Veterinarians (OVs) on behalf of DEFRA. Many have experienced difficulties in exporting live horses, with some having export health certificates rejected at the border. The system OVs had become used to was so efficient and relatively straightforward that they could not have predicted the degree of difficulty since encountered. There have been several thousands of movements between the UK and Ireland and mainland Europe in 2021 and this has been associated with many hours of stress, worry and thousands of stamps and signatures. There have been many different interpretations of the health certificates and acceptance has been inconsistent. Sometimes the wording in the health certificate doesn't seem to make sense and the nuances of the language need to be understood. However, the only way we OVs can learn is to have feedback from our colleagues at DEFRA and from the EU borders. This is beginning to be fed back to OVs. We can also learn from fellow OVs in the field and those that have shared their experiences have provided valuable feedback. There are flaws in the systems and services in place but OVs all need to work together to overcome these challenges. There have been opportunities for colleagues; those who have taken up the products qualification, enabling them to certify other goods to the EU, are fulfilling roles essential to maintain trade with the EU.

However, change is ahead, with new amendments to the EU Animal Health Law coming into effect on the 21st April 2021. It is stated that the law '...replaces and extends existing EU rules on animal health bringing most together into one simpler law encouraging a better focus on the key priorities in tackling disease' (https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM%3A3005_2). It should make responsibilities clearer, simplify administration, provide veterinary authorities with a clearer legal basis and better tools for managing transmissible disease, offer more flexibility and reduce adverse effects on animal and human health, as well as the environment. How the law will practically affect practitioners in the UK is not fully understood. However, it will likely affect the current format of the Export Health Certificate (EHC) and OVs will likely need to adapt to this. Some lessons will have been learned, so that the chaos in January and February will not be repeated.

There are also serious challenges facing those wishing to export germplasm (semen and oocytes/embryos) ahead of this breeding season. Such exports need to be from EU-approved semen (and embryo) storage centres or embryo collection teams so there are less OVs involved with this work, and veterinary surgeons may be acting as exporter and certifier. At present, next day delivery of chilled germplasm from the UK to the EU is not possible, with commercial couriers unable to commit to next day delivery. The hope is, that once all the problems get ironed out, the next-day service will once again resume. Although, when and how consistent the service will be, is unknown. Northern Ireland now also differs with regard to semen exportation; semen needs to be collected at an EU centre and be accompanied by an EHC. Importation of germplasm has also been problematic with some unable to import and some test shipments being delayed. It is difficult to predict how this will affect breeding with chilled semen in 2021. We hope that some benefit will come from this and the illegal importation of semen with inappropriate or inadequate health status can be prevented.

The equine sector is not alone in this and all sectors from florists to shellfish farmers have faced difficulty with imports and exports. We must keep communicating and sharing our experiences, good and bad, and together we will find a new normal. **EQ**



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member

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