

CHAIR'S REPORT October 2021

With the constantly changing timescales for the introduction of the EU Animal Health Law – and the direct and indirect effects that this has had on import, export and breeding schedules for pedigree equines (indeed on all equines of every type) -- it is quite hard to define exactly how the situation that the members of the 826 Equine Studbooks Association now find themselves in is compared to 6 months ago. The flow of information from DEFRA and other sources has certainly been extensive – and sometimes rather confusing and complex – and as Chair I have tried to keep you all informed of it by forwarding it to you as soon as it arrived in my Inbox, but whether we are all actually any the wiser about where we currently are in this post-Brexit COVID-19 infected age is difficult to tell. This is particularly true where the transport and documentation of animals bound to or from Northern Ireland is concerned and watching the regular webinars on this subject have devoured quite a number of my hours over the past few months.

Of course, there are a few definite steps forward that have taken place. The most important of these is that not only has the EU now recognised all UK-based DEFRA approved studbooks as approved studbooks from a Third Country, but the same has happened in reverse, so that (almost) all EU-approved studbooks are now also recognised in the UK by DEFRA as Third Country studbooks as well. And if we think we had problems getting EU approval at our end, spare a thought for the head of the German National Federation, who – as the competent authority for all the German studbooks – had to perform a similar task for GB recognition of over 600 mother, filial and regional breeding organisations for which he is ultimately responsible. The Expanded Breeding Programme initiative, on the other hand, is still in development but hopefully DEFRA will be able to give us an update at this meeting.

In addition, a series of on-line meetings took place with DEFRA on matters relating to studbook issues, often concerning on-going problems with the CED and the ER but also dealing with wider issues including possible future changes to the passport regulations (such as the introduction of a digital passport) now that we are no longer a member state of the EU and we are assured by DEFRA that such consultations will continue in the future.

As a member of the British Horse Council, we have also regularly stressed to them that studbooks are the solution – not the problem – as far as ensuring much more traceability and full records of equines with the CED and the ER and we had hoped that we were getting our message through. However, even if we were, the opinion of the EFRA committee (as published in Horse and Hound a few weeks ago) that centrally produced digital passports are the solution to the data gaps is deeply disappointing and something we must argue against in every stage of the forthcoming DEFRA consultation on the subject.

Most of the other areas we have been involved in over the past 6 months are covered in specific items on the Agenda, so do not need any further explanation or identification here.

Celia Clarke

(Chair, 826 Equine Studbooks Association)