

# Research Amongst Independent Greyhound Tracks

Report for: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs,  
The Scottish Government and The Welsh Government

GfK

# Background

# Objectives / key questions

The main objective is to provide an overview of the profile, procedures and practices at independent tracks, and about the trainers which use them

1. Approximately how many independent greyhound trainers operate solely on independent tracks?
2. Of these, how many can be considered to be operating as a business, and how many can be considered to be operating as a hobby?
3. What is the total number of greyhounds racing on independent tracks?
4. On average, how often are they racing and at how many tracks?
5. How many of these greyhounds are kept in trainers' kennels and how many are kept in private dwellings or other premises?
6. How many dogs are kept by each trainer?
7. What is the total number of kennel / private dwellings / other premises involved?
8. Where do the greyhounds race (including cross-over between GBGB and independent tracks)?
9. To what extent is there awareness of GBGB welfare standards, what is the perception of these standards and are these standards being met?
10. What are the overall views of animal welfare?

# Methodology

# Qualitative and Quantitative interviews

The research methods chosen were considered as the best case scenario, given that little was known about the independent tracks, the way they are run and the trainers that race/school greyhounds there

	Method	Interviewee	Content covered
<b>Qualitative</b>	45-minute depth telephone interviews	Owners / track managers Vets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Track racing and how it is organised (number of days/week races are held etc.)</li><li>• Types of record keeping</li><li>• Vet qualifications</li><li>• Views of facilities at tracks</li><li>• Views on and involvement in animal welfare standards</li></ul>
<b>Quantitative</b>	5-minute interview – paper questionnaire (10 questions)	Trainers / owners / breeders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Number of greyhounds owned / racing</li><li>• Frequency of racing</li><li>• Commercial vs. hobby</li><li>• Location(s) of where greyhounds are kept and where they race</li></ul>

# Who did we speak to?

All 7 independent tracks in GB were selected to be contacted, however, one track had closed down, 2 refused to take part and one was never successfully contacted. Of the **3 tracks that agreed to take part**, we interviewed:

## Qualitative

## Quantitative

**3**

Owners / managers of the tracks

**34**

Trainers / owners / breeders

**1**

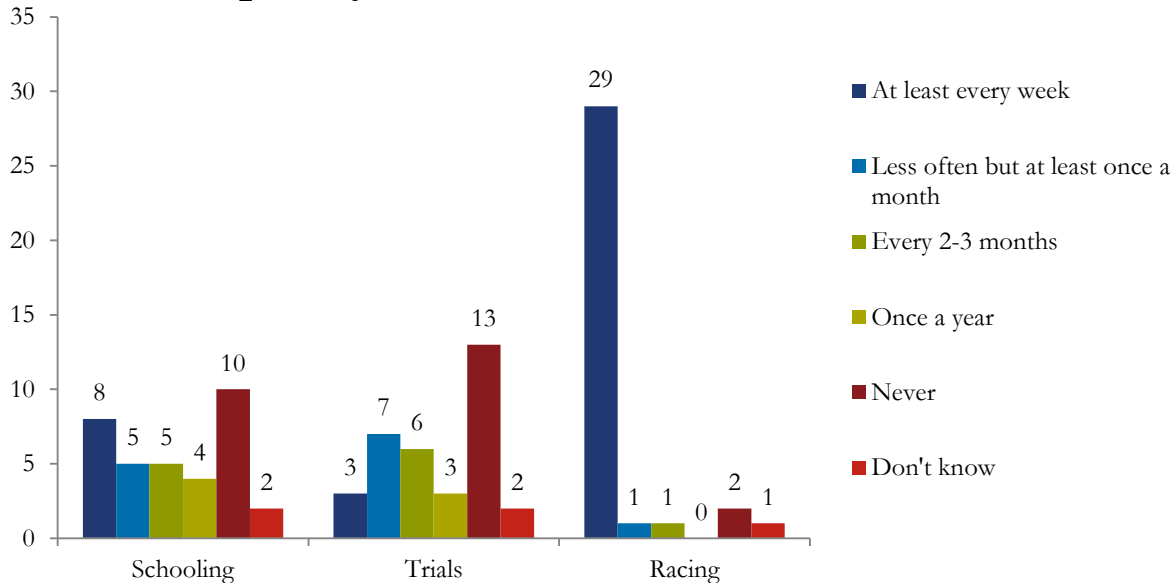
Vet assigned to one of the tracks

**\*\* Due to low base sizes, we cannot include any quotes in the qualitative analysis in order to avoid identification of respondents. The low base size for the quantitative research also means sub-group analysis is not possible. The lack of a known profile of trainers using independent tracks means we cannot check whether the interviewed sample is representative.**

# Findings: Overview of independent track activity

# The tracks host a number of activities. Racing and schooling tends to happen more frequently

## Frequency of Activities



## Other activities:

- Whippet and Lurcher and occasional rescue dog meetings
- Social functions
- Fur and feather sales

**(A04):** In the past 12 months how often have you done the following..., Base: 34 respondents

**Note:** Raw figures shown



Despite this, independent tracks are small and face a decline in business. There are fears of track closures

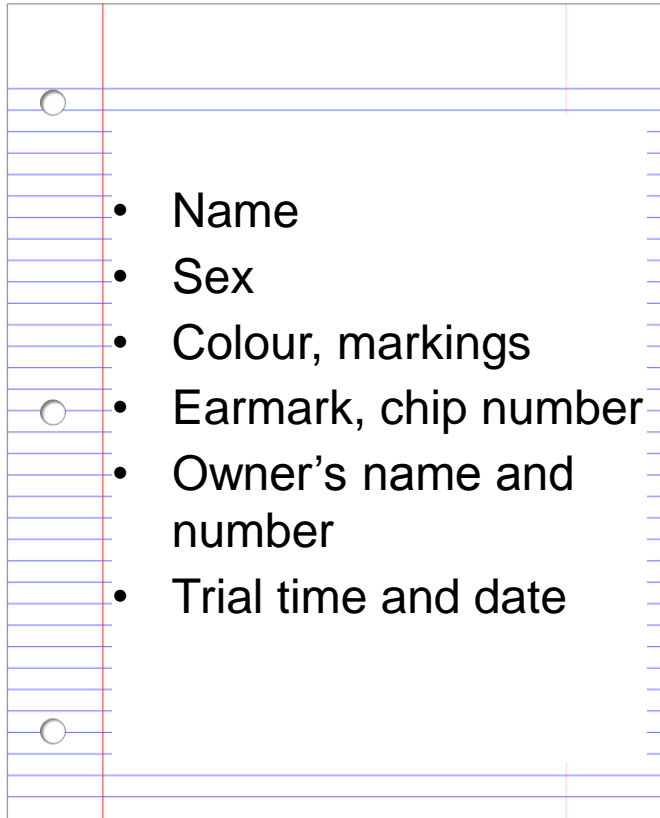
### Interviews with track managers

- Fewer tracks operate in the local area
- Fewer sessions run at the track (1-2 per week)
- Fewer greyhounds and trainers attending (40-60 greyhounds at each session)
- With a reduction in races there is less money to be made (first prizes being £20-£40)

# Sentiment of Struggle

Track managers express a real sentiment of struggle; becoming less financially viable or running at a loss. It was expressed that there is a lack of level playing field between registered and independent tracks. For example, since there is no provision for schooling at registered tracks, schooling is reliant upon independent tracks, yet they receive no support from the industry.

# Record-keeping is primarily paper-based



- Name
- Sex
- Colour, markings
- Earmark, chip number
- Owner's name and number
- Trial time and date



Data for the track is subsequently entered into a computer database and trainers keep paper records on each of their greyhounds. Card templates with information on each greyhound are kept on file at the track.



Vet and injury records are kept in the vet's room *where there is a vet in attendance on site*

# Veterinary provisions are present and adequate but could benefit from minor improvements

## Veterinary Checks

- The vet makes visual checks of the greyhounds as they enter the track but undertakes hands-on inspection only where required. It can take a while for trust to develop before owners start bringing their dogs to the vet

## Veterinary provisions

- There are extensive kennels, though greyhound owners largely choose not to use them
- A dedicated, locked veterinary room with adequate lighting, hot & cold water, tables, storage
- Vet in attendance or on call\* at all trials and races



### Suggested improvements:

- More machines to measure blood sugar
- Better facilities that make cleaning easier
- Adjustments to the cambers on floors to give a better run-off

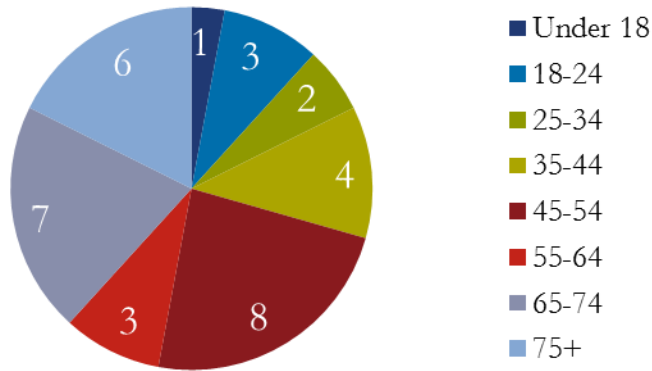
# Findings: Profile of trainers / owners / breeders

# Greyhound owners / trainers tend to be from an older generation



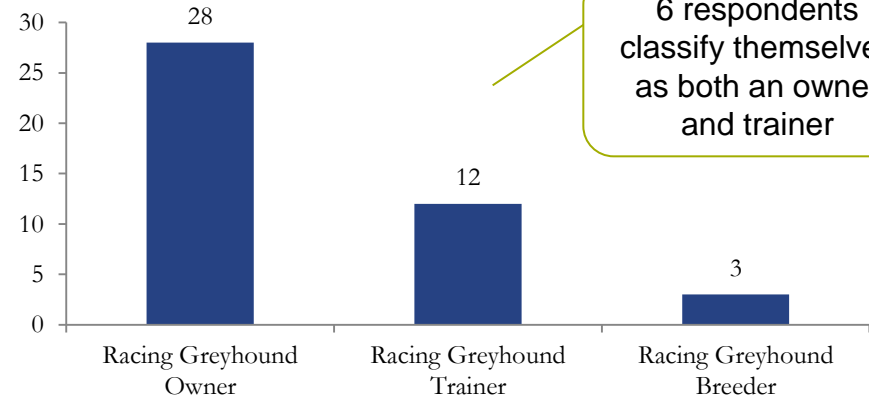
- Most fall into the 45-75+ age bracket
- Track managers claim that most greyhound owners have been involved for 20+ years and express that there is an absence of a new generation of enthusiasts

## Respondent Age



**(A08):** Age of Respondent, Base: 34 respondents  
**Note:** Raw figures shown

## Classification of Greyhound Owners



**(A01):** Classification of Greyhound Owners, Base: 34 respondents  
**Note:** Raw figures shown

# Greyhound owners / trainers are perceived as hobbyists, racing greyhounds for leisure

**29** out of 34 owners / trainers said that greyhound racing is for **leisure** or as a **hobby**

## Interviews with track managers

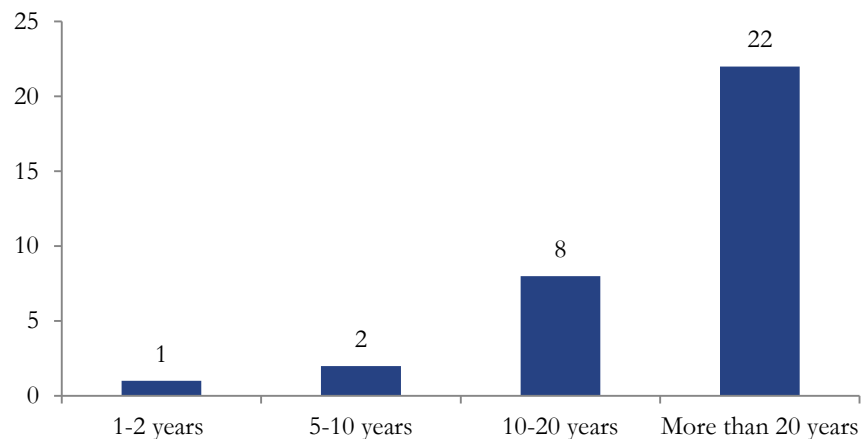
- Attendees of the independent tracks are described as hobbyists
- With a reduction in races there is less money to be made (first prizes being £20-£40)



Track managers claim that involvement at the independent tracks are largely family concerns, with a nostalgic attachment to an activity that people have engaged in since childhood. It was also expressed that the majority of trainers who attend are regulars who invest a great deal of time and money in their dogs

With greyhound activities being a family-oriented hobby, most take place at the one independent track and are long-standing

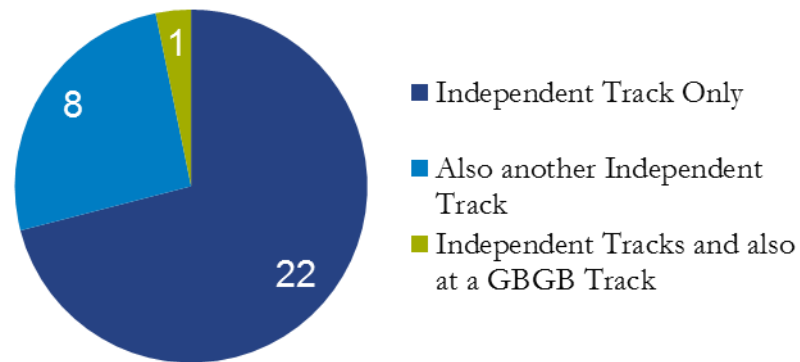
## Experience at Track



**(A09):** Experience at track, Base: 34 respondents

**Note:** Raw figures shown

## Tracks Used by Greyhound Owners



**(A05):** Tracks used by greyhound owners, Base: 34 respondents

**Note:** Raw figures shown

# Typically, there are only a small number of greyhounds per owner / trainer

Looking at the number of greyhounds owned / trained in the last 12 months, there are more greyhounds involved in racing than in training. The average number of dogs per trainer involved in racing is 4; the most common is 2.

Number of dogs	Pre-racing	Racing	Retired (previously raced on GBGB tracks)	Retired (previously raced only on independent tracks)
None	18 respondents	4 respondents	19 respondents	23 respondents
1-2	7 respondents	13 respondents	11 respondents	9 respondents
3-5	6 respondents	10 respondents	4 respondents	1 respondents
6-10	3 respondents	4 respondents	0 respondents	1 respondents
11 or more	0 respondents	3 respondents	0 respondents	0 respondents
<b>Total number of dogs</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Average number of dogs per trainer</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>

In-depth interviews with track managers suggest there tends to be a limit of 2-4 greyhounds per trainer due to availability of space and expenses

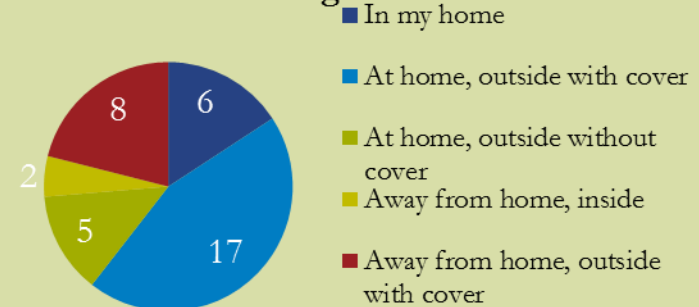


# The small number of greyhounds per owner / trainer means greyhounds are treated like pets



- Most trainers keep their greyhounds at home. Of those kept at home, most are outside with some form of cover.
- Trainers tend to bring greyhounds to meetings in cages in their own vehicles in order to provide a familiar environment for their greyhounds

## Where are the greyhound(s) that you currently own and/or train mainly kept overnight?



- When a greyhound becomes unsuitable for racing most owners either keep them as a pet or rehome their greyhound (either at a greyhound rehoming centre, at another dog rescue centre or with another private individual).
- Only 2 trainers claimed to have taken the action of euthanasiation in the last 12 months for when a greyhound becomes unsuitable for racing. This was for a reason other than injury.

# Findings: Awareness of and attitudes towards animal welfare standards

# Perceptions of animal welfare standards at the independent tracks are positive



From the interviews with track managers and vet, greyhounds are seen as being well looked after, with care given to their diet and exercise. It is perceived that no risks are taken if a greyhound is not fully fit to race.

The view was expressed by those with experience of GBGB racing as well as independent tracks that the welfare standards of greyhounds that race at independent tracks is much higher due to:

- Greyhounds being kept like pets at home; with fewer in number for each owner, there is more time and attention spent on them
- Greyhounds are often slower retirees from GBGB racing, and it was perceived that the trainer is giving them an extended career and lifespan
- It is down to the trainer's discretion to enter a greyhound for a race rather than someone under pressure from a manager
- Many trainers keep their greyhounds as a pet after they have retired from racing

# On the other hand, there is concern for the welfare of greyhounds racing at GBGB tracks



Concern for the welfare of greyhounds at GBGB tracks are due to the perception expressed that:

- The number of dogs per owner/trainer is much more and therefore less manageable
- There is more emphasis on financial gain, with the involvement of organisations such as Bookmakers Afternoon Greyhound Service putting pressure on tracks to provide numbers of greyhounds
- The commercial focus – the view was expressed that, with the emphasis on betting, greyhounds are perceived more as commercial mechanised objects
- A focus on expensive accommodation and equipment (i.e. restaurants, turnstiles)
- Rules on the use of track kennels means that a greyhound is kept in an unfamiliar environment for hours

# Animal welfare standards is an increasing interest for independent tracks



Animal welfare initiatives put forward include:

- Temporary accommodation being offered for use by a greyhound rescue / re-homing centre for a period of time, free of charge
- A new membership scheme allowing people to donate money for the welfare of greyhounds retired from racing at independent tracks
- A more planned approach to the post-retirement re-homing process

## In summary...

- *Based on the interviews, it was found that these independent tracks are small and facing a decline in business. There are fewer tracks, fewer sessions (1-2 per week), fewer greyhounds (40-60 at each session) and fewer races at each session.*
- *Activities at the independent tracks are done for leisure and perceived as typically family concerns.*
- *Most owners/trainers who attend the tracks are regulars and own/race 2-4 greyhounds each.*
- *Owners/trainers keeps their greyhounds more like pets, and it is perceived that greyhounds are well taken care of.*